



Limousin, the Dordogne & the Lot

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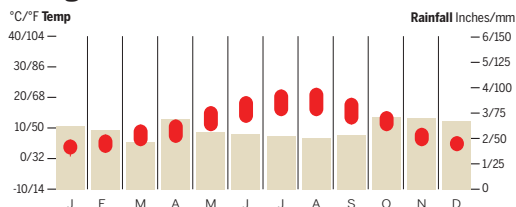
Why Go?

Together, Limousin, the Dordogne and the Lot are the heart and soul of *la belle France*, an enchanting land of dense oak forests, emerald-green fields and famously rich country cooking. Turreted châteaux and medieval villages line the riverbanks, while wooden-hulled *gabarres* (barges) meander along the waterways.

Of the three adjacent areas, the Limousin *région* – encompassing the Haute-Vienne, Creuse and Corrèze *départements* – is the most traditional, strewn with country farms and sleepy hidden hamlets, as well as a cache of architectural treasures from the Middle Ages in its main hub, Limoges. To the south, the Dordogne *département* has a bevy of *bastides* (fortified towns) and clifftop castles as well as astonishing prehistoric sites including some of Europe's oldest and most spectacular cave paintings. Further south still, the Lot *département* is ribboned with twisting rivers, limestone gorges, subterranean caverns, and vintage vineyards basking in the warm southern French sunshine.

When to Go

Limoges



Late February Feast on goose-based specialties as Sarlat-la-Canéda celebrates its feathered mascot.

Mid-May See strawberry parades, auctions and more, paint picturesque Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne red.

December to March Browse markets selling Périgord black truffles, particularly in 'truffle capital' Sorges.

Regional Parks

This corner of France is renowned for its unspoilt natural beauty, with huge swathes protected in three *parcs naturels régionaux*: **Périgord-Limousin** (www.parc-naturel-perigord-limousin.fr, in French) in the northwest, **Millevaches en Limousin** (www.pnr-millevaches.fr, in French) in the east and **Causse de Quercy** (www.parc-causses-du-quercy.org, in French) in the south. All three regional parks offer a wealth of outdoor activities. Tourist offices throughout the region stock *balades à la journée* (day walk) leaflets and *VTT (vélo tout terrain*; mountain bike) guides, while dedicated park topoguides detail major walking routes including the GR (*grands randonnées*; long-distance) trails. Numerous trails and bridleways can also be explored on horseback.

RIVER TRIPS

One of the most memorable ways to explore the region is along its scenic waterways. Canoe and kayak operators abound, generally charging under €30 per day including minibus transport, *gilets* (life jackets) and an introduction to basic safety procedures (such as how to survive capsizing!). Or simply sit back and watch the countryside float by aboard a traditional *gabarre* (flat-bottomed boat; see p583).

Unmissable Villages

- » **Rocamadour** Clinging to a plunging cliff-face, this ancient pilgrimage spot is one of France's most awe-inspiring sights.
- » **St-Cirq Lapopie** Artist studios are tucked throughout the tiny streets of gravity-defying St-Cirq high on a hilltop above the Lot Valley.
- » **Brantôme** Pleasure-cruise boats ply the waters of this Venetian-style village criss-crossed by medieval bridges.
- » **Collonges-la-Rouge** Red sandstone houses and an 11th-century church huddle in the narrow lanes of France's original 'most beautiful village'.
- » **Najac** Nestled beneath a fairy-tale castle in remote rolling countryside.

PRIME HIKING COUNTRY

- » Northwest Limousin's mountains
- » Along the Lot Valley
- » The age-old Santiago de Compostela route, which passes through many of the region's southerly towns

Resources

The area's official tourism sites are a handy way to keep tabs on upcoming festivals, events and exhibitions.

- » www.tourismelimousin.com
- » www.tourisme-haute-vienne.com
- » www.tourisme-creuse.com
- » www.vacances-en-correze.net
- » www.dordogne-perigord-tourisme.fr
- » www.tourisme-lot.com

Most Atmospheric Markets

- » **Sarlat-La-Canéda** Saturday sees Sarlat's spider-web of cobbled lanes spill over with stalls laden with local specialties like walnuts, wine and foie gras.
- » **Perigueux** Gourmet delicacies galore fill Perigueux's squares on Wednesday and Saturday.
- » **Brive-la-Gaillarde** Hectic outdoor markets burst into life every Tuesday and Saturday.



Limousin, the Dordogne & the Lot Highlights

- 1 Marvel at the prehistoric cave art sheltered in the wooded **Vézère Valley** (p573)
- 2 Listen to the music of glamorous and eccentric diva Josephine Baker inside her former home, **Château des Milandes** (p582)
- 3 Tour the stallions' stables, mares' stable and magnificent

château of one of France's foremost *haras* (stud farms) at **Arnac-Pompadour** (p559)

4 Taste the local firewater *l'eau de noix* (walnut liqueur) at its 1839-established distillery in **Brive-la-Gaillarde** (p559)

- 5 Watch craftspeople at work at one of the oldest

traditional French accordion-makers in **Tulle** (p561)

- 6 Stroll the walkways circumnavigating an excavated 1st-century Roman villa in **Périgueux** (p565)

- 7 Visit the prestigious factories producing France's finest china in **Limoges** (p553)

① Getting There & Around

AIR The major transport hub is Limoges, which has regular flights to many French and UK cities. Bergerac also has domestic and international budget flights, as does the new airport at Brive-la-Gaillarde.

BUS The bus network is patchy and frustratingly geared around school timetables; most towns and villages can be reached more quickly and easily by train. A useful rail link runs to Toulouse from Limoges via Brive-la-Gaillarde, Souillac and Cahors; Limoges and Périgueux are both on the southwest main line from Paris.

CAR As always in rural France, having your own wheels is really handy. The A20 motorway heads north from Limoges to Paris and continues south to Toulouse.

LIMOUSIN

With its quiet lanes, flower-filled villages and country markets, Limousin is tailor-made for walkers and cyclists and the perfect place to escape the summertime crowds further south.

The Limousin *région* is made up of three *départements*: Haute-Vienne, in the west, the *préfecture* (capital) of which is the lively city of Limoges; the rural Creuse, in the northeast; and, in the southeast, the Corrèze, home to many of the region's most beautiful villages.

Limoges

POP 141,287

If you're a china connoisseur, you'll already be familiar with the legendary name of Limoges. For over 200 years this elegant city has been the preferred place for the French upper crust to pick up their tableware, and several factories around the city still produce France's finest china. You can see some stunning examples at museums and galleries as well as public spaces around town.

Compact and lively, Limoges is easy to explore on foot. Historic buildings and museums cluster in the medieval Cité quarter and radiate out from the partly pedestrianised Château quarter in the city centre. If you come by train you'll be arriving in style: the city's grand art deco Gare des Bénédictins, completed in 1929, is one of France's most resplendent railway stations, graced by a copper dome, carved frescos and a copper-topped clock tower.

👁 Sights

To discover Limoges' famous enamel and porcelain, see p553.

CHÂTEAU QUARTER

This bustling corner of Limoges is the heart of the old city. Just off place St-Aurélien, the **rue de la Boucherie** – named after the butchers' shops that lined the street in the Middle Ages – contains many of the city's loveliest timbered houses. The **Maison de la Boucherie** (36 rue de la Boucherie; admission free; ☉10am-1pm & 2-7pm Jul-Sep) houses a small history museum, and nearby is the tiny **Chapelle Saint-Aurélien**, dedicated to the patron saint of butchers.

Named for the two granite lions flanking the door, the **Église St-Michel des Lions** (rue Adrien Dubouché) was built between the 14th and 16th centuries. It contains St-Martial's relics (including his head) and some beautiful 15th-century stained glass, but its most notable feature is the huge copper ball perched atop its 65m-high spire.

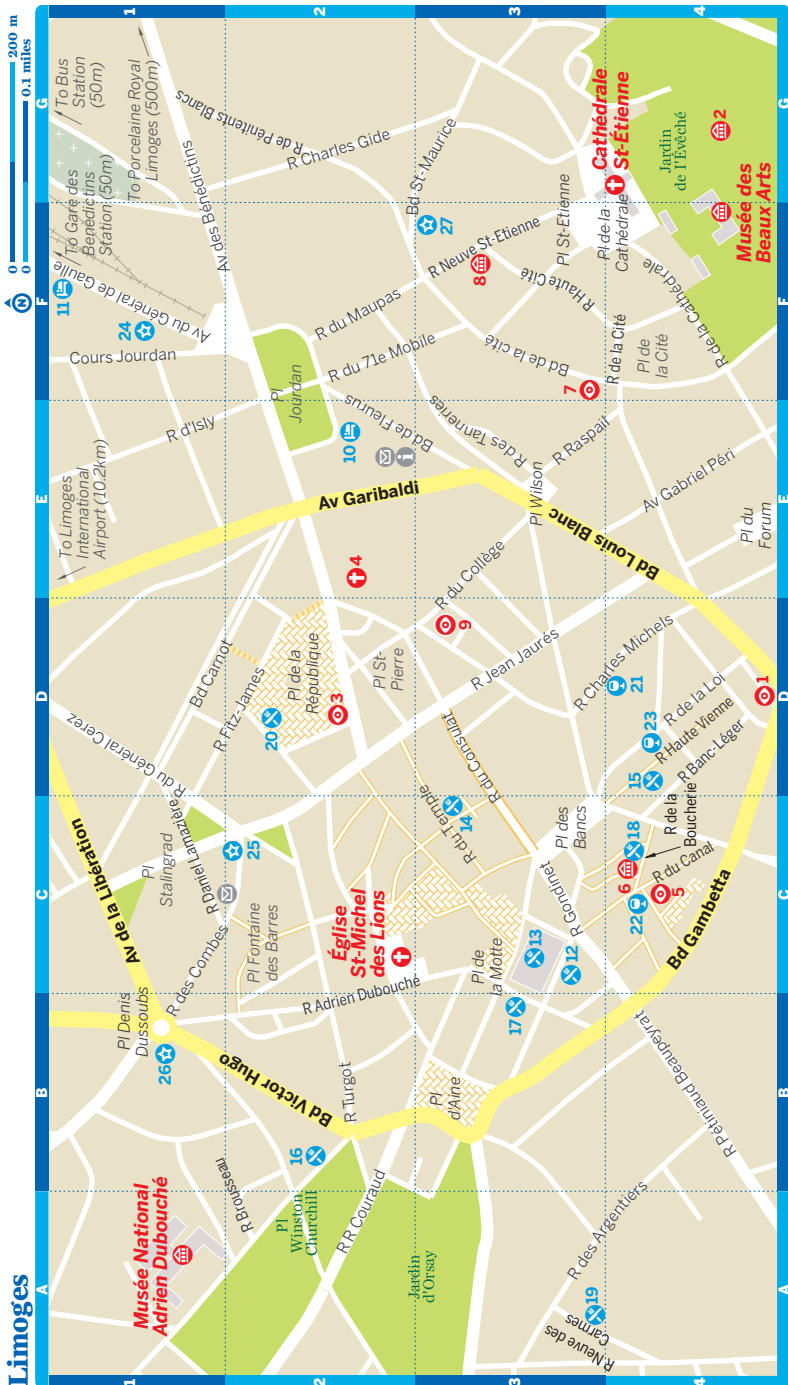
Nearby is the **Cour du Temple**, a tiny enclosed courtyard reached via an alleyway from rue du Temple. The courtyard was formerly a private garden belonging to the nearby *hôtels particulier* (private mansions): look out for various coats-of-arms and the 16th-century stone staircase around the edge of the courtyard.

All that remains of the great pilgrimage abbey of St-Martial, founded in AD 848, is an outline on place de la République. The **Crypt of St-Martial** contains the tomb of Limoges' first bishop, who converted the population to Christianity. Just to the east is the moody **Église St-Pierre du Quay-roix** (place St-Pierre), which is notable for its characteristic Limousin belfry and stained glass.

Once you've done your cultural duty, chill out at the **Aquarium du Limousin** (www.aquariumdulimousin.com; 2 bd Gambetta; adult €7, child €4.50-5.50; ☉10.30am-6.30pm), where 2500 fish swim in the subterranean surroundings of Limoges' old water reservoirs.

CITÉ QUARTER

A few steps east of the Château quarter more fine medieval buildings occupy the Cité quarter, where you'll find Limoges' premier museums. Dominating the quarter is the **Cathédrale St-Étienne**, one of the few Gothic churches south of the Loire. Built



between 1273 and 1888, the cathedral's highlights include the richly decorated Portail St-Jean, as well as a glorious rose window and a Renaissance rood screen. To the cathedral's south, both medicinal and toxic herbs flourish in the **Jardin de l'Évêché**, Limoges' botanical garden.

Limoges

Top Sights

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Église St-Michel des Lions.....	C2
Musée des Beaux Arts.....	F4
Musée National Adrien Dubouché.....	A1

Sights

1 Aquarium du Limousin.....	D4
Chapelle Saint-Aurélien.....	(see 22)
2 Cité des Metiers et des Arts.....	G4
Cour du Temple.....	(see 14)
3 Crypt of St-Martial.....	D2
4 Église St-Pierre du Queyroix.....	E2
5 Galerie du Canal.....	C4
6 Maison de la Boucherie.....	C4
7 Maison de l'Émail.....	F3
8 Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation.....	F3
9 Pavillon du Verdurier.....	D3

Sleeping

10 Hôtel de la Paix.....	E2
11 Hôtel Jeanne d'Arc.....	F1

Eating

12 Chez Alphonse.....	C3
Chez François.....	(see 13)
13 Halles Centrales.....	C3
14 La Parènthèse.....	C3
15 Le 27.....	D4
Le Bistrot d'Olivier.....	(see 13)
16 Le Bistrot Gourmand.....	B2
17 Le P'tit Bouchon.....	B3
18 Les Petits Ventres.....	C4
19 Paroles de Chef.....	A3
20 Planetalis.....	D2

Drinking

21 L'Amicale des Parachutistes Belges.....	D4
22 Le Duc Étienne.....	C4
23 Le Tabernacle.....	D4

Entertainment

24 Cinéma Lido.....	F1
25 Fnac.....	C2
26 Grand Écran.....	B1
27 Le Buckingham.....	F3

The massively refurbished **Musée des Beaux Arts** (www.museedesbeaux-artsdelimoges.fr; place de la Cathédrale), housed in Limoges' 18th-century bishops palace, is due to have reopened by the time you read this. Its huge decorative-arts collection includes lesser-known paintings by **Pierre Auguste Renoir** (1841–1919), who was born in Limoges and worked in a porcelain factory as a boy, painting designs on fine china.

The Limousin was a stronghold of the Resistance during WWII, and the **Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation** is due to reopen at new, expanded premises. The museum's collection ranges from radios to weapons, diaries, letters and even a Free French aeroplane. Ask at the tourist office for updates.

Near the cathedral, the **Cité des Métiers et des Arts** (www.cma-limoges.com, in French; 5 rue de la Règle; adult/child €5/2.50; ☺2–6pm) showcases work by top members of France's craft guilds.

Sleeping

Limoges makes a good weekend break, when rates often drop. The majority of the city's hotels are located around the train station.

Nos Rev

HOTEL €

(☎05 55 77 41 43; www.hotelnos-rev.com, in French; 16 rue du Général du Bessol; d €47-72; ☺) A breath of fresh air, Nos Rev does away with old-fashioned furnishings – its dozen contemporary rooms are decorated in adventurous colours like lime and cherry red, with sharp, stylish bathroom fixtures. For the price, this is the best deal in town. The hotel is just a couple of blocks west of the train station.

Arthôtel Tendance

HOTEL €€

(☎05 55 77 31 72; www.arthoteltendance.com; 37 rue Armand Barbès; s €65-85, d €71-95; @☺) Decor spans the globe at this quirky 13-room hotel. Its *chambres de thème* include a maple-clad Canadian cabin, a Balinese room with Lombok furniture, and a Grecian room decked out in whites and sea blues. Other overnight destinations include Africa, Egypt, Provence and Morocco. It's around 500m northwest of the train station.

Hôtel de la Paix

HOTEL €

(☎05 55 34 36 00; hoteldelapaix87@hotmail.com; 25 place Jourdan; d €42.50-72; ☺) This creaky classic is a bit faded but full of charm. The

FROM CATTLE & CLOAKS TO HIGH-CLASS CARS

Limos – stretch or otherwise – may not have originated in Limousin, but the term certainly did. Centuries ago, shepherds who raised Limousin's famed beef cattle wore long cloaks to keep out the cold and rain. Fast-forward to the beginning of the 20th century, when new, luxurious cars were designed with enclosed passenger compartments and open, though roofed, drivers' seats. This open-sided roof resembled the hood of a Limousin cloak, hence the car was named a limousine (the feminine version of *Limousin* in French). The abbreviation limo first appeared in the 1960s. To this day, limo drivers sit in a separate compartment to their passengers (as opposed to other chauffeur-driven cars), just like their horse-drawn carriage predecessors.

ground floor is occupied by the owner's Mechanical Music Museum, stuffed with gramophones, rinky-dink record players, barrel organs and other musical oddities, while the upper corridors hide small, clean, serviceable rooms livened up by the odd theatrical knick-knack.

Château Ribagnac

B&B €€

(05 55 39 77 91; www.chateauribagnac.com; St Martin-Terressus; d incl breakfast €100-180; ☎☎) Heading slightly further afield (19km east of Limoges) brings you to this aristocratic estate owned by two British ex-lawyers, whose struggles to renovate the château were documented in the fly-on-the-wall UK TV series *No Going Back*. It's a real palace, with rooms ranging from a chandelier-lit grand suite to a super-romantic honeymoon suite with its own balcony. You can relax during communal *tables d'hôte* (half board from €200 per double including wine by reservation) as kids dine together earlier.

Hôtel Familia

HOTEL €

(05 55 77 51 40; www.hotelfamilia.fr, in French; 18 rue du Général du Bessol; s €48-55, d €53-60) This small family-run hotel is the pick of the budget places near the station. Forget frills – easy-clean fabrics and pastel colours

are the order of the day – but it's good value, especially if you get a room over the flowery back garden.

Hôtel Jeanne d'Arc

HOTEL €€

(05 55 77 67 77; www.hoteljeannedarc-limoges.fr; 17 av du Général de Gaulle; s €66-84, d €79-98; ☎) Originally a *relais de poste* (mail staging post), this smart hotel makes a fine base as long as you're not after anything avant-garde. Classic decor includes richly coloured checked and striped fabrics, heavy drapes and hefty furniture.



Eating

Les Petits Ventres

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(05 55 34 22 90; www.les-petits-ventres.com; 20 rue de la Boucherie; lunch menus €14.50-25, dinner menus €25-35; ☎closed Sun & Mon Sep; ☎) One of several atmospheric restaurants in the old butchers' district, this wood-beamed dining room specialises in meat-heavy classics, from *andouillettes* (tripe sausages) to *fricassée de rognons* (fried kidneys).

Le 27

FRENCH €€

(05 55 32 27 27; www.le27.com, in French; 27 rue Haute-Vienne; lunch menus €13.50-14.50, mains €15-23.50; ☎Mon-Sat) Blending contemporary decor with culinary invention at this cutting-edge restaurant, teardrop lanterns twinkle, neon lights buzz and waistcoated waiters bustle, while the menu takes in everything from gingered guinea-fowl to 'mysterious meringue'. One whole wall is taken up by the wine selection, so you won't be short of a tippie.

Chez Alphonse

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(05 55 34 34 14; 5 place de la Motte; menus €10-25; ☎Mon-Sat) Hearty ingredients, rich sauces and hard-core French cooking define this unpretentious checked-tablecloth stalwart. The menu's stuffed with regional dishes (including horse steak and veal head), so if you want to try traditional Limousine cuisine, this is definitely the place.

La Parenthèse

RESTAURANT, TEAROOM €

(www.restaurant-tearoom-parenthese-limoges.com; Cour du Temple, 22 rue du Consulat; menus €13.50-16; ☎11.45am-2.30pm Mon, 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sat; ☎) Forty teas and 14 coffees are served, in Limoges porcelain of course, at this charming spot, along with salads and traditional menus incorporating regional produce. Save space for the delicious

LIMOGES CHINA

For over 300 years the name of Limoges has been synonymous with *les arts du feu* (fire arts): *émail* (enamel) and *porcelaine* (porcelain). Limoges had been producing decorative enamel since at least the 12th century, but its fortunes were transformed by the discovery of an extremely pure form of kaolin near St-Yrieix-La-Perche in 1768. This fine white china clay, a vital ingredient in porcelain manufacture (along with quartz and feldspar), had previously been imported at huge expense from the Far East. Its discovery on home soil led to an explosion of hard-paste porcelain production in Limoges in the late-18th and 19th centuries.

Three factors distinguish porcelain from other clay-baked ceramics: it's white, extremely hard and translucent. Porcelain is fired three times, first at about 950°C; again, after being covered by liquid enamel, at about 1450°C, and one last time, at 900°C or so, to ensure the hand-painted or machine-applied decoration adheres to the surface.

Keep your eyes peeled while you wander around the city: many of Limoges' buildings are decorated with porcelain and enamel tiles, such as **Pavillon du Verdurier** (place St-Pierre), an octagonal, porcelain-faced structure dating from 1900, and the Halles Centrales, with a porcelain fresco depicting the goodies on sale in the market.

Museums and galleries with superb examples of the city's famous fire arts:

Musée National Adrien Dubouché (www.musee-adriendubouche.fr; 8bis place Winston Churchill; adult/child €4.50/free, 1st Sun of month free; ☉10am-12.25pm & 2-5.40pm Wed-Mon) National museum, with stunning new extensions due to open in 2011, housing one of the two great china collections in France (the other is in Sèvres, near Paris). The 12,000-strong collection features pieces from the golden age of Limoges porcelain as well as from rival factories such as Meissen, Royal Doulton and Worcester, ranging from dinner services and hand-painted vases to porcelain clocks and delicate figurines.

Musée des Beaux Arts (p551) Due to display enamel and porcelain.

Maison de l'Émail (www.enamel-house.com; 18-20 bd de la Cité; admission free; ☉2-7pm Wed-Sat) Provides a fascinating overview of techniques and hosts exhibitions; serious aficionados should ask about guided visits (in French).

Galerie du Canal (www.galerieducanal.fr, in French; 15 rue du Canal; admission free; ☉10am-noon & 2-7pm Tue-Sat) Cooperative gallery run by local enamellers displaying contemporary work.

Many of the city's famous factories producing celebrated *marques* (brands) are still in business; the following all have factory shops.

Porcelaine Royal Limoges (☎05 55 33 27 30; www.royal-limoges.fr; 28 rue Donzelot; ☉shop 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) One of the oldest factories, dating from 1797 and housing the **Four des Casseaux** (www.fourdescasseaux.fr; admission €3; ☉10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), the only surviving example of the original mighty brick kilns. Standing 19.5m high and capable of reaching the searing temperatures needed to fire porcelain, it certainly puts your microwave into perspective. It's 500m southeast of the train station.

Haviland (www.haviland.fr; av du Président Kennedy; admission free; ☉10am-1pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Screens an informative film and has a little museum. Located 3km southeast of the city centre.

Bernardaud (☎05 55 10 55 91; www.bernardaud.fr; 27 av Albert Thomas; tours adult/child €4.50/free; ☉9am-11.15am & 1-4pm) Has a small museum and offers guided tours taking you step by step from raw materials to finished pieces – phone ahead for tour times or ask at the tourist office. Bernardaud is situated 1km northwest of the city centre.

homemade desserts like tangy *tarte au citron meringuée* (lemon meringue pie).

Le Bistrot Gourmand

FRENCH €€

(www.bistrotgourmand.fr, in French; 7 place Winston Churchill; menus €10-19.50; ☺Mon-Sat; ♣) A lively student crowd fills the wrought-iron and marble tables of this busy bistro lined with vintage advertising posters and paintings. Give yourself plenty of time to deliberate over no fewer than 105 *plats* and 60 different desserts.



Planetalis

ORGANIC €

(www.planetalis.com, in French; place de la République; menus €10-11; ☺7.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat; ♣) If you're a vegetarian and feeling a little unloved about now, drop into Limoges' branch of this *bio* (organic) canteen-style French chain for vitamin-packed sandwiches, salads and hot dishes to eat in or take away.

For the full-flavoured local dining experience, head to the bistros in and around the Halles Centrales, crammed with everyone from office workers to market traders:

Le Bistrot d'Olivier

REGIONAL CUISINE €

(Halles Centrales; menus €12-15; ☺7am-2pm Mon-Sat) Bistros don't get more Gallic than this rough-and-ready gem.

Chez François

REGIONAL CUISINE €

(Halles Centrales; menus €11-20; ☺6am-2pm Mon-Sat) If Le Bistrot d'Olivier's full, squeeze in here for authentic local cooking.

Le P'tit Bouchon

REGIONAL CUISINE €

(17 place de la Motte; menus €13; ☺7am-3pm Tue-Sat) Endearingly scruffy little bistro opposite the market dishing up lunchtime staples to a convivial crowd.

Self-Catering

Halles Centrales (place de la Motte; ☺to 1pm) covered market is full of local-produce stalls that run the gourmet gamut from local cheese to Limousin beef.

Foodie haven **Paroles de Chef** (☺05 55 32 30 66; www.parolesdechef.com; 15 rue Neuve des Carmes; ☺épicerie Tue-Sat) has a gourmet *épicerie* (grocer) and runs cooking and wine-tasting courses (from €50), as well as its own restaurant.



Drinking & Entertainment

The large student crowd keeps Limoges' nightspots ticking; you'll find most of the

action around rue Charles Michels and place Denis Dussoubs.

Event tickets are sold at **Fnac** (☺08 25 02 00 20; 8 rue des Combes; ☺2-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat).

Le Buckingham

BAR, CLUB

(www.lebuckinghamclub.com, in French; 23 bd St-Maurice; ☺Thu-Sat) Uber-cool late-night bar/disco spinning up-to-the-minute tunes until 7am.

Le Duc Étienne

BAR

(place St-Aurélien; ☺daily) This long-standing hang-out in the medieval quarter has a hip little bar supplying European beers and late-night coffee to a pre-club crowd. In summer things spill onto the terrace in front of Église St-Aurélien.

La Fourmi

LIVE MUSIC

(www.lafourmi87.net, in French; 3 rue de la Font Pinot) The best place in town for musos, with breaking acts, alternative bands and theatrical spectacles in a twin-floored warehouse-style space. It's about 1km out of town, but worth the trek. Opening times vary so check the website for what's on when.

L'Amicale des Parachutistes Belges

LIVE MUSIC

(www.myspace.com/parachutistes_belges; 17 rue Charles Michels; ☺Tue-Sun) Belgian beers and a buzzy gig scene are the draws at this boozier where soul, funk, ragga and rock acts regularly grace the stage.

Le Tabernacle

LIVE MUSIC

(http://limoges.limousin.free.fr/tabernacle, in French; 19 rue de la Loi; ☺Wed-Sat) Part pub, part club, part grungy gig venue. Bare brick and industrial styling conjure up a lived-in vibe at this late-night venue.

Grand Écran (www.grandecran.fr, in French;

9-11 place Denis Dussoubs) Multiplex cinema screening nondubbed films.

Cinéma Lido (www.allocine.fr; 3 av du Général de Gaulle) Artier films.

Information

Main post office (1 rue Daniel Lamazière) Offers currency-exchange services and has an ATM.

Post office (6 bd de Fleurus) Has an ATM.

TendanceWeb (www.tendanceweb.com, in French; 5 bd Victor Hugo; per hr €3; ☺10am-2am Mon-Thu, 10am-4am Fri & Sat, 2pm-2am Sun) Internet access.

LA VILLAGE MARTYR

On the afternoon of 10 June 1944, the little town of **Oradour-sur-Glane**, 21km northwest of Limoges, witnessed one of the worst Nazi war crimes committed on French soil. German lorries belonging to the SS 'Das Reich' Division surrounded the town and ordered the population on to the market square. The men were divided into groups and forced into *granges* (barns), where they were machine-gunned before the structures were set alight. Several hundred women and children were herded into the church, and the building was set on fire, along with the rest of the town. Only one woman and five men survived the massacre; 642 people, including 193 children, were killed. The same SS Division committed a similarly brutal act in Tulle two days earlier, in which 99 Resistance sympathisers were strung up from the town's balconies as a macabre warning to others.

Since these events, the entire **village** (☺9am-6pm) has been left untouched, complete with tram tracks, prewar electricity lines, the blackened shells of buildings and the rusting hulks of 1930s automobiles – an evocative memorial to a once-peaceful village caught up in the brutal tide of war. At the centre of the village is an underground memorial inscribed with the victims' names; poignantly, there are also display cases collecting their recovered belongings, including watches, wallets, hairpins and a couple of children's bikes.

Entry is via the **Centre de la Mémoire** (adult/child €7.70/5.20), which contextualises the massacre using historical exhibitions, video displays and survivors' testimonies. Various theories have been put forward to try to explain the event – perhaps German panic following the Allied landings four days earlier, or reprisal for sabotage raids committed by the Resistance following the invasion – but it may be one of those terrible events that simply defies any rational explanation.

After the war Oradour was rebuilt a few hundred metres west of the ruins. Buses travel from the bus station in Limoges to Oradour-sur-Glane (€2, 30 minutes, several daily except Sundays in winter). By car, take the D9 and follow signs to the *village martyr* (martyred village).

Tourist office (☎05 55 34 46 87; www.tourisme-limoges.com; 12 bd de Fleurus; ☺9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun; ☎)

Getting There & Away

Air

Just off the A20 10km west of the city, **Limoges International Airport** (☎05 55 43 30 30; www.aeroportlimoges.com) is a major UK gateway, served by budget carriers including Ryanair and Flybe as well as Air France. Domestic destinations include Paris Orly, Lyon, Nice and Figari (Corsica), while UK destinations include London Stansted, London Gatwick, Nottingham, Liverpool, Southampton, Edinburgh, Manchester, Newcastle, Leeds-Bradford and Birmingham. A summertime shuttle (one way €7) between the airport and Limoges' train station operates from mid-June to September; otherwise a taxi takes 15 minutes and costs around €20.

Bus

Limoges' bus station is across the tracks from the train station; tickets anywhere in the Haute-Vienne *département* cost a flat €2.

Bus 12 goes to Oradour-sur-Glane (45 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday), buses 14 and 21 service Rochechouart (one hour, four to six daily Monday to Saturday), and SNCF line 9 coaches travel to St-Léonard de Noblat (30 minutes, five to eight daily).

Car

Rental companies include **ADA** (☎05 55 79 61 12; 27 av du Général de Gaulle) and **National-Citer** (☎05 55 77 10 10; 3 cours Bugeaud).

Train

Destinations include Paris Gare d'Austerlitz (€52.10, three hours, hourly), Périgueux (€15, one hour, 15 daily), Cahors (€30.50, 2½ hours, four daily), Brive-la-Gaillarde (€18.20, one hour, 15 daily), Tulle (€18.70, 1¼ hours, five to seven daily) and Arnac-Pompadour (€10.80, 1¼ hours, two to three daily) as well as the nightly train to Barcelona. Tickets can be bought at the station and at the town-centre **SNCF boutique** (4 rue Othon Péconnet).

West of Limoges

ROCHECHOUART & CHASSENON

POP 3930

Meteorites and modern art might be an unlikely combination but they're the twin draws of the walled town of Rochechouart, 45km west of Limoges. Rochechouart witnessed one of the most devastating impacts in Earth's history 200 million years ago when a massive 1.5km-radius lump of intergalactic rock slammed into the Earth at 72,000km/h with the force of 14 million Hiroshima bombs. The impact site, 4km west of town, created a crater 20km wide and 6km deep, but the only visible traces are the unusual rocks, frequently used as local building material, left behind by the massive explosion. The **Éspace Météorite Paul Pellias** (☎05 55 03 02 70; www.espacemeteorite.com; 16 rue Jean-Parvy; adult/child €4/2; ☉10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun) explores this cosmic cataclysm through minerals, models and video displays. Hours are geared around school holidays, so check ahead to make sure it's open.

Housed in the town's refurbished château, highlights of the **Musée Départemental d'Art Contemporain** (☎05 55 03 77 91; www.musee-rochechouart.com, in French; place du Château; adult/child €4.60/2.30, free 1st Sun of month; ☉10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Wed-Mon) include a collection of works by acclaimed Dadaist Raoul Hausman and an installation of white stones by British artist Richard Long in a room decorated by 16th-century frescoes.

About 5km from Rochechouart are the Gallo-Roman baths of **Chassenon** (☎05 45 89 32 21; www.cassinomagus.fr; adult/child

€5/2.50, audio guide €1, guided tours €1.50; ☉10am-6.30pm Mon-Sun). Rediscovered in 1844 and excavated from 1958 to 1988, this luxurious former way station known to the Romans as Cassinomagus was an important crossroads on the Via Agrippa, the road that crossed France via Saintes, Périgueux, Limoges, Clermont-Ferrand and Lyon. Much of the complex (including a temple and amphitheatre) were plundered for stone, but you can still make out the baths, plunge pools and hypocausts, the Roman equivalent of underfloor heating. Regular events include live entertainment, Roman sports and exhibitions.

Domaine des Chapelles (☎05 55 78 29 91; www.domainedeschapelles.com; Oradour-sur-Vayres; d €85-140; ☉☒), in open countryside near Oradour-sur-Vayres, is a former shepherd's barn that has been transformed into the ultimate romantic hideaway. Cappuccino-and-cream colour schemes sit alongside exposed stone and rustic tiles in the boutique rooms. Some have private terraces and room 8 even has its own hydro-massage bath and sauna. The country **restaurant** (menus €18-29) is also superb (check out the funky sheep murals!).

For buses to Rochechouart from Limoges see p555.

East of Limoges

GUÉRET & BOURGANEUF

POP GUÉRET 15,089 / BOURGANEUF 3184

The busy town of Guéret grew up around a 12th-century monastery and the 15th-century Château de Moneyroux, now the administrative HQ of the Creuse *département*.

THE LION OF THE LIMOUSIN

The spectre of Richard Cœur de Lion (Richard the Lionheart) looms over the Haute-Vienne *département*. The crusading king waged several bloody campaigns here in the 12th century before meeting his end at the now-ruined keep of **Château de Chalus-Chabrol**, 40km west of Limoges, where he was mortally wounded by a crossbowman in 1199. Legend has it that once the keep was captured, Richard pardoned the crossbowman (actually a young boy), before expiring on 6 April 1199 in the arms of his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Richard's heart was buried in Rouen in Normandy, his brain in the abbey of Charroux in Poitiers and his body in the Loire Valley's Abbaye de Fontevraud beside his father, Henry II; rather unsportingly, the crossbowman was later skinned alive by Richard's captain, Mercadier.

Many other medieval châteaux and monuments nearby share a Lionheart connection, which are signposted along the **Route de Richard Cœur de Lion** (Richard the Lionheart route; www.routerichardcoeurdelion.fr, in French); pick up the free English-language leaflet from local tourist offices.

ment, of which Guéret is capital. Guéret itself isn't that exciting, but it's a handy base for exploring nearby attractions, including the fascinating wolf sanctuary at **Le Parc Animalier des Monts de Guéret** (www.loups-chabrieres.com, in French; adult/child €8.50/7; ☺10am-8pm), where black and grey wolves roam free across a 12-hectare park; and the **Labyrinthe Géant** (www.labyrinthe-gueret.fr, in French; adult/child €6.50/4.50; ☺10am-8pm daily Jul & Aug, 2-8pm Sat & Sun May-Jun & Sep), where you can get well and truly lost among the hedgerows in what's allegedly the world's largest maze.

Bourgeois Bourgneuf is also worth a stop, especially for its atmospheric old town. Its main claim to fame came in 1886, when it became one of the first places in France to be connected to mains electricity. In summer the **Musée de l'Électrification, de l'Eau et de la Lumière** (☺05 55 64 07 61; rte de la Cascade; admission free; ☺10am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug) explores this electrifying event.

South of Bourgneuf, the Limousin is at its lushest, especially around **Plateau de Millevaches** (www.pnr-millevaches.fr, in French) and the glassy **Lac de Vassivière** (www.vassiviere.com, in French), a popular spot for water sports and afternoon picnics.



Sleeping & Eating

Abbaye du Palais

B&B €€

(☺05 55 64 02 64; www.abbayedupalais.com; d €90-160; ☑☑) Between Bourgneuf and Guéret, this cosy B&B is lodged in a former Cistercian-abbey-turned-family home. Cats, dogs, rabbits and kids charge around the grounds, where you'll find the ruins of a chapel, a monks' dorm and a pet farm. Inside the grand house are three doubles and four suites filled with antiques, tapestries and fireplaces. Ask about *tables d'hôte* – and cookery clinics if you fancy polishing up your knife skills.

Le Moulin Noyé

HOTEL €€

(☺05 55 52 81 44; www.moulin-noye.com, in French; route de La Châtre, Glénic; d from €120) With rooms named after composers, in shades like raspberry pink and apple green, this backcountry haven overlooks wooded countryside above the Creuse River 9km northwest of Guéret. Its **restaurant** (menus €12-62) is a fave of local gourmets for its seasonal local produce, from lake fish to Limousin beef – book ahead.

La Ferme de la Gorce

FARMSTAY €

(☺05 55 41 11 55; www.gites-de-france-limousin.com, in French; 86 av du Limousin, Guéret; s/d €45/55) Just outside Guéret is this reassuringly rustic base, with plenty of wood and solid stone in the low-ceilinged rooms and friendly hosts who are full of info on the surrounding area.

AUBUSSON

POP 4400

Along with pottery and porcelain, the northern Limousin is famous for its tapestries, which once adorned the walls of aristocratic houses from London to the Loire Valley to insulate against the cold, especially in draughty castles.

The small, very pretty riverside town of Aubusson was the clacking centre of French carpet production during the 19th century (rivalled only by the Gobelins factories in Paris), producing elegant tapestries characterised by their vivid colours, fine detail and exquisite craftsmanship. The industry suffered a steady decline following the French Revolution, before being revived between WWI and WWII by inventive new designers such as Jean Lurçat, Sylvaine Dubuisson and Dom Robert.



Sights

Tapestry Workshops

WORKSHOPS

Today there are around 20 tapestry workshops in Aubusson and nearby Felletin, 10km south. The tourist office, in Aubusson, arranges visits to local tapestry *ateliers* (workshops), and can supply you with a list of local galleries and showrooms such as **Atelier Duché** (www.atelier-duche-aubusson.com, in French; 35 Grand Rue; ☺9am-6pm Tue-Sat).

Maison de Tapisserie

TAPESTRY MUSEUM

(<http://mtapisserie.lacreuse.com>, in French; adult/child €5/3; ☺9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm) Next door to the tourist office in a 16th-century mansion. Exhibits at the Maison de Tapisserie re-create the atmosphere of a 17th-century weaver's workshop, with tools, original furniture and (of course) vintage tapestries.

Musée Départemental de la Tapisserie

TAPESTRY MUSEUM

(av des Lissiers; adult/child €5/free; ☺9.30am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) For a historical overview, head to the Musée Départemental de la Tapisserie, which houses intricate examples of both antique and modern tapestries produced in Aubusson.

ALL ABOARD!

Clamber aboard the carriages pulled by the 1932 steam engine **Chemin Touristique Limousin-Périgord** (www.trainvapeur.com, in French) to watch the Limousin's gloriously green fields and forests roll by.

The railway runs between mid-July and mid-August. Reservations are essential and can be made through the Limoges tourist office. There are six circuits in all; the following lines run three times a season. Prices are return.

Limoges-Eymoutiers (adult/child €24/10) Follows the old upland railway via St-Leonard-de-Noblat.

Limoges-Pompadour (adult/child €50/45) Includes a visit to the stables of Arnac-Pompadour.

Eymoutiers-Châteauneuf-Bujaleuf (adult/child €13/5) Via the plunging Gorges de la Vienne.

Exposition-Collection Fougerol

TAPESTRY MUSEUM

(34 rue Jules Sandeau; adult/child €3/free; ☎9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm) The Exposition-Collection Fougerol features some 135 tapestries from the 16th to 19th centuries from Aubusson as well as Flanders.



Sleeping & Eating

Villa Adonis

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €

(☎05 55 66 46 00; www.villa-adonis.com; 14 av de la République; d €55-65; ☎) From the funky watch-battery keys to the power showers and stripped-back colour schemes, this 19th-century stone villa on Aubusson's outskirts hints at big-city style. All rooms overlook a lovely garden, and the buffet breakfast (€7) includes homemade fresh-fruit jams and proper espresso.

L'Hôtel de France

HOTEL €€

(☎05 55 66 10 22; www.aubussonlefrance.com; 6 rue des Déportés; d €62-95; ☎) This former post inn-turned-upmarket Logis hotel has 21 plush rooms – some modern, some old-fashioned and frilly, some tucked into the attic with sloping ceilings and roof beams – and a wellness centre including a hammam. Its **restaurant** (menus €20-36) is the best in town, with a smorgasbord of Limousin dishes served to the tune of a tinkling piano.



Information

Tourist office (☎05 55 66 32 12; rue Vieille; www.ot-aubusson.fr, in French; ☎9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm)



Getting There & Away

Aubusson is 90km east of Limoges. Trains (or SNCF buses) link Aubusson with Limoges (€13.90, 1¼ hours, three daily Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday).

South of Limoges

SOLIGNAC

POP 1497

In the thickly wooded Briance Valley, 10km south of Limoges, the tiny medieval village of Solignac was a major stop on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. Its 11th-century **church** is a Romanesque wonder, renowned for its 14m-wide domed roof. The stalls in the nave are decorated with carved wooden sculptures of human heads, fantastical animals and a monk mooning the world, while the columns depict human figures being devoured by dragons.

Five kilometres southeast are the ruins of the **Château de Chalucet**, a 12th-century keep occupied by the English during the Hundred Years War. The ruins make a fine picnic spot, with valley views from the tumbledown keep. Nearby in Le Vigen, the **Parc Zoologique du Reynou** (www.parczoo-reynou.com; adult/child €13/9; ☎10am-8pm, last entry 2hr before closing) is a 35-hectare safari park established on land once owned by the Haviland china dynasty. Its exotic denizens include wolves, giraffes, wildebeest, snowy owls and a pair of breeding tigers.

About the only place to stay nearby is **Hôtel Le St-Eloi** (☎05 55 00 44 52; www.lesainteloi.fr; 66 av St-Eloi; d €58-85), with 15 sunny rooms inside a shuttered building opposite the church. The ones with jacuzzis and terraces are fantastic value, and half board is available at the **restaurant** (menus €34-37; ☎closed dinner Sun).

Three or four buses daily (except Sunday) connect Limoges with Solignac (€2, 25 minutes) and Le Vigen (€2, 35 minutes). The Solignac-Le Vigen train station is linked to

Limoges (€2.70, 10 minutes) and Uzerche (€8.20, 40 minutes) by several trains daily.

ARNAC-POMPADOUR

POP 1279

Actually two contiguous villages, Arnac-Pompador revolves around its château, rising up in the centre of Pompador. It's famous (and indeed infamous) for its association with the mistress of Louis XV, Madame de Pompador (born Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson). Having been presented at the château in 1745, she not only stayed here but also helped develop the area into one of France's foremost *haras* (stud farms). Renowned for its Anglo-Arab pedigrees, this *Cité de Cheval* (horse town) became an Haras National in 1872.

Based at the château, **Les Trois Tours** (☎05 55 98 51 10; www.les3tours-pompador.com) arranges one-hour visits of the **château** (adult/child €7/6), the **écuries des étalons** (stallions' stables; adult/child €6/5) and the **jumenterie de la rivière** (mares' stable; adult/child €6/5), and, from July to September, the 80-hectare **Chignac** (adult/child €6/5) site, where the colts and fillies from the mares' stables reside before starting their training at the age of two. Passes for two/three/four tours cost €11/16.50/22 per adult and €9/13.50/18 per child.

Opposite the château entrance, the **tourist office** (☎05 55 98 55 47; www.pompador.net; ☎10.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm) has details of regular race meetings, as well as a grand horse show on 15 August and a whole day dedicated to the humble *âne* (donkey) on 14 July.

The tourist office also runs tours of the 16th-century **Chapelle St-Blaise** (adult/child €4/2; ☎up to 6 tours daily Mon-Sat), behind the château, that walls and ceiling of which are graced with a monumental 300-sq-metre **mural** in ethereal blues and greens painted by French artist André Brasilier (b 1929). Tours include entry to the **Espace Culturel St-Blaise** (place de la Poste), which displays Brasilier's works and screens a film (in French) documenting the mural's creation.

Arnac-Pompador is about 60km south of Limoges, served by train (€10.80, 1¼ hours, two to three daily).

UZERCHE

POP 3271

On a promontory over the rushing Vézère River, the walled town of Uzerche is one of the Limousin's prettiest hilltop ham-

lets. Spiky turrets jut out from the walls of the 15th- and 16th-century **maisons à tourelles** (turret houses) like witches' hats, while the **Porte Bécharie**, one of the nine original gates that granted access to the village in the 14th century, remains remarkably intact. Uzerche's single street leads uphill to the **Église St-Pierre**, a fortified church with an 11th-century crypt – one of the oldest crypts in the Limousin. Out the front, there's a fabulous panorama over the river valley from **place de la Lunade**, which takes its name from a pagan summer solstice (now rejigged as a Christian procession). Nearby, the **tourist office** (☎05 55 73 15 71; www.pays-uzerche.fr; place de la Libération; ☎10am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) sells work by local artists, like patchwork teddy bears and handmade pottery, in summer.

Uzerche has just a couple of hotels. Despite the Teyssier's well-worn exterior, inside **Hôtel Jean Teyssier** (☎05 55 73 10 05; www.hotel-teyssier.com; rue du Pont-Turgot; d €54-68; ☎☎☎) you'll find a comfortable modern hotel: the 14 rooms are fresh and well furnished, with magnolia walls and checked and striped fabrics. Downstairs, the **restaurant** (menus €20-26) serves Limousin staples with a Mediterranean twist in a panoramic dining room overlooking the river.

Uzerche's other choice, **Hôtel Ambroise** (☎05 55 73 28 60; www.hotel-ambroise.com, in French; av Charles de Gaulle; s €46, d €51; ☎closed mid-Nov-Feb; ☎) has snug, old-fashioned rooms (some with river views) and a garden-side **restaurant** (menus €13.50-26).

Uzerche is linked to Limoges, 56km to the north, by train (€12.60, 40 minutes, six to eight daily). The train station is 2km north of the old city along the N20.

Brive-la-Gaillarde

POP 51,629

Busy Brive-la-Gaillarde is the main commercial and administrative centre for the Corrèze *département*. Apart from its bustling weekly markets, Brive itself is short on sights, but it's a good base for exploring the Corrèze as well as the upper Lot and north-eastern Dordogne.

Sights & Activities

FREE **Maison Denoix**

DISTILLERY

(☎05 55 74 34 27; www.denoix.fr; 9 bd du Maréchal-Lyautey; ☎9am-noon & 2.30-7pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun) Since 1839 this traditional

distillery has been producing the favourite firewater of the Corrèze, *l'eau de noix* (walnut liqueur), alongside adventurous concoctions such as chocolate liqueur, quince liqueur and curaçao. You can wander around the old copper cauldrons and stills, or take a (free) guided tour at 2.30pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays in July and August, and sample the wares at its well-stocked shop, including *moutarde violette de Brive* (purple mustard made with grape must).

Musée Labenche

MUSEUM

(www.musee-labenche.com; 26bis, bd Jules-Ferry; adult/child €4.70/2.50; ☎10am-6.30pm Wed-Mon) Exhibits at the town's main museum explore local history and archaeology, as well as a unique collection of 17th-century English tapestries, accordions dating from the late 19th century to 1939, and a piano that once belonged to Debussy.

Collegiale St-Martin

CHURCH

In the heart of town, the Romanesque Collegiale St-Martin dates from the 11th century, but it's taken a battering over the centuries: the only original parts are the transept and a few decorated columns depicting fabulous beasts and biblical scenes.



Sleeping & Eating

Brive has no fewer than 150 restaurants, cafés and bars. Limousin beef, goose products, liqueurs, plum brandy and *galette corrézienne* (walnut and chestnut cake) are just some of the specialties at Brive's **markets**, which take over the central place du 14 Juillet every Tuesday and Saturday morning (with a smaller market on Thursday morning).



Château de Castel-Navet

CASTLE HOTEL €€€

(☎05 55 85 09 03; www.castelnavet.com; Varetz; d €140-390; ☎☎☎) Just 10km north of Brive-la-Gaillarde, this beauty of a château was immortalised by the French author Colette, who based herself here while writing *Le Blé en Herbe* and *Chéri*. Topped by turrets, gables and slate tiles, filled with idiosyncratic rooms (including a turret room and Colette's Louis XVI apartment) and surrounded by sweeping lawns and an 18th-century orangery within 10 tree-filled hectares, it's no wonder Madame Colette found it inspiring. Equally inspired is the château's Michelin-starred gastronomic **restaurant** (menus €26-78).

La Truffe Noire

HOTEL €€

(☎05 55 92 45 00; www.la-truffe-noire.com, in French; 22 bd Anatole-France; d €95-135; ☎☎) By far the top spot in the town centre, this grand old girl has 27 swish rooms decked out with beige and cream fabrics, big beds and the odd beam or two. The **restaurant** (menus €25.50-39) is even better, serving rich Limousin fare such as truffle-marinated salmon and Limousin beef with truffle-purée potatoes.

Hôtel du Chapon Fin

HOTEL €€

(☎05 55 74 23 40; www.chaponfin-brive.com, in French; 1 place de Lattre-de-Tassigny; d €54-84; ☎☎☎) Freshly renovated, spick-and-span rooms in this white-shuttered hotel are smart and contemporary, as is its **restaurant** (menus €12-40), serving world-influenced cuisine.

Auberge de Jeunesse

HOSTEL €

(☎05 55 24 34 00; brive@fua.org; 56 av Maréchal Bugeaud; dm €13.20; ☎) Well-run and friendly, Brive's hostel is set around a former mansion (housing reception), with squeaky-clean dorms in a newer wing, and a small self-catering kitchen in the 16th-century stables. It's a 1.5km walk from the station; check to make sure someone's around when you arrive.



Information

The **tourist office** (☎05 55 24 08 80; www.brive-tourisme.com; place du 14 Juillet; ☎9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) is housed in a former water tower, locally known as the *phare* (lighthouse), overlooking the market square.



Getting There & Away

Brive is a major rail and bus junction.

AIR Brive-Vallée de la Dordogne Airport (www.aeroport-brive-vallee-dordogne.com), about 10km south of town, has budget flights to Paris-Orly and London City Airport.

BUS The bus station (place du 14 Juillet) is next to the tourist office.

TRAIN The train station (av Jean Jaurès), 1.3km from the town centre, can be reached via most buses heading south out of town. Regular services include Limoges (€18.20, one hour, 15 to 18 daily), Périgueux (€11.80, one hour, six to eight daily) and Cahors (€18.20, one hour, eight to 10 daily). To get to Sarlat (€8.80, 1½ hours, three to five daily), you'll need to change (usually onto an SNCF bus) at Souillac.

TULLE ACCORDIONS

There's nothing more Gallic than the sound of an *accordéon* squeezing out tunes on a street corner. The industrial town of **Tulle** (population 16,474), 28km northeast of Brive, is renowned as the world's accordion capital. A single accordion consists of between 3500 and 6800 parts and making one requires up to 200 hours' labour, so mass production has never been an option. The very best instruments can fetch upwards of a staggering €9000.

One of the oldest traditional accordion makers, Tulle's celebrated **Usine Maugein** (☎05 55 20 08 89; rte de Brive; admission free; ☀8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Thu), runs guided factory tours by reservation, where you can see the craftspeople at work and browse the accordion museum.

The accordion takes centre stage during mid-September's annual four-day street music festival **Nuits de Nacre**; Tulle's **tourist office** (☎05 55 29 27 74; 2 place Emile Zola; ☀9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat) has details.

Trains link Tulle with Limoges (€18.70, 1¼ hours, five to seven daily).

East of Brive

GIMEL-LES-CASCADES

POP 703

A huddle of slate roofs, flower-filled balconies and higgledy-piggledy cottages gather along the banks of a rushing brook of this tiny, typically Corrèzien village. It's a place to wander the lanes, drink in the atmosphere, and stroll along the banks of the river. The three crashing **cascades**, after which the village is named, are reached via a riverside path at the foot of the village. The local **church** contains a beautiful enamelled reliquary known as the **Châsse de St-Étienne**, made in the 12th century by Limoges craftsmen.

Other nearby sights include the remains of the Cistercian **Abbaye d'Aubazine** (☎05 55 84 61 12; ☀guided visits 10.30am, 3pm & 4pm Jul & Aug, rest of year by appointment) and the **Étang de Ruffaud**, a glassy pond that offers a refreshing dip and a shady place for a picnic.

Gimel's teensy **tourist office** (☎05 55 21 44 32; www.gimellescascades.fr, in French; ☀2-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 3-6.30pm Sat, 3-6.30pm Sun) shares space with the post office.

The **Hostellerie de la Vallée** (☎05 55 21 40 60; www.logishotels.com; d €60; ☀Mar-Dec) makes for a sweet stopover, with nine small, pleasant rooms tucked around the corridors of an old stone cottage in the heart of the village. With panoramic valley views, its **restaurant** (menus from €17) is a down-home treat, with an old-fashioned dining room and hearty dishes like rabbit and beef stew.

South of Brive

Rolling countryside and green pastures unfold south of Brive to the banks of the Dordogne and the border of the northern Lot.

TURENNE

POP 812

Rising up from a solitary spur of rock, the hilltop village of Turenne is an arresting sight: honey-coloured stone cottages and wonky houses are stacked up like dominoes beneath the towering **château** (☎05 55 85 90 66; www.chateau-turenne.com; adult/child €4/2.60; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm), built to protect the feudal seat of the Vicomtes de Turenne. The views of the surrounding countryside from the Tour de César, the castle's arrow-straight tower, are so beautiful that you may well find yourself blinking to make sure they're real. Apart from a few ramparts and a 14th-century guard room, the rest of the castle and lordly lodgings have crumbled away, and are now occupied by an ornamental garden.

The **tourist office** (☎05 55 24 12 95; guided visits adult/child €4/free, fire torch €1; ☀10am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun) is at the base of the village, and runs guided visits as well as torchlit night-time costumed promenades in summer by reservation.

Turenne's only hotel is **La Maison des Chanoines** (☎05 55 85 93 43; maison-des-chanoines.com, in French; d €56-100; ☀Apr-mid-Oct). Behind its 16th-century Flamboyant Gothic facade you'll find sparingly decorated country rooms and a good **restaurant** (menus €34-49; ☀dinner Thu-Tue) tucked within its stone walls.

From Brive, there are usually three daily **buses** (www.cftaco.fr, in French) from Monday to Saturday (€2; 35 minutes). If you're catching a train (€3.20, 15 minutes), you'll arrive at Turenne Gare, 3km southeast of the village, and will have to make your way on foot.

COLLONGES-LA-ROUGE

POP 475

With its skyline of conical turrets, rickety rooftops and historic buildings built from rust-red sandstone (hence its name), Collonges-la-Rouge is one of the classic postcard villages of the Corrèze. In 1942, thanks to the efforts of villagers, the entire village received classification as a *monument historique*, and in 1982 France's **plus beaux villages** (most beautiful villages; www.les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org) association was established here by Collonges' then mayor, Charles Ceyrac.

Collonges centres on the part-Romanesque **church**, constructed from the 11th to the 15th centuries on an 8th-century Benedictine priory, which was an important resting place on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. In a stirring show of ecclesiastical unity, during the late 16th century local Protestants held prayers in the southern nave and their Catholic neighbours prayed in the northern nave. Nearby, the slate roof of the ancient **covered market** shelters a similarly ancient baker's oven.

Browsing Collonges' artisan shops and pausing at its clutch of traditional cafés and restaurants is an enjoyable way to while away a few hours, but start out early as it steadily fills with tourists as the day wears on.

On the edge of the village, the grandiose B&B **Jeanne Maison d'Hôte** (☎05 55 25 42 31; www.jeanneaisonhdotes.com; d €90; 🍷), in a towering 15th-century *maison bourgeoise*, is a real home away from home. The five rooms all have quirky fixtures and antique furniture, from writing desks and decorative screens to chaises longues and latticed windows (our favourite is the chimney room, with its own enormous inglenook fireplace), and the home-cooked *tables d'hôte* (for €35 with wine) are a treat.

A couple of kilometres down the road in the village of Meyssac, **Relais du Quercy** (☎05 55 25 40 31; www.relaisduquercy.com. fr; Meyssac; d €55-70; 🍷🍷) is a jaunty little slate-roofed country hotel with beautiful

gardens and comfy and cosy (if unremarkable) rooms. The nicest look out over the rear terrace, but all have spotless bathrooms and soft beds.

The **tourist office** (☎05 55 25 47 57; www.ot-collonges.fr, in French; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm) is next to the town hall on the village's 'main' road, off the D38.

Collonges is linked by bus with Brive, 18km to the northwest along the D38 (€3, 30 minutes, four to six daily on weekdays, one on Saturday).

BEAULIEU-SUR-DORDOGNE

POP 1326

On a tranquil bend of the Dordogne hemmed by lush woods and fields, Beaulieu (meaning 'beautiful place') lives up to its name. Once an important stop for Compostela pilgrims, its beautifully preserved medieval quarter is one of the region's finest: a network of curving lanes lined with timber-framed houses and smart mansions, many dating from the 14th and 15th centuries.

Beaulieu's biggest party is the **Fête de la Fraîse** (Strawberry Festival), marking the annual harvest on the second Sunday in May. Strawberry-focused events fill the town's streets, including strawberry auctions, strawberry parades and the eating of a gargantuan strawberry tart to close the festival in style.

👁 Sights & Activities

Abbatiale St-Pierre

ABBAY CHURCH

Beaulieu's most celebrated feature is this 12th-century Romanesque abbey church with a wonderful **tympanum** (c 1130) depicting scenes from the Last Judgment including dancing apostles and resurrected sinners. The nearby **Chapelle des Pénitents** was built to accommodate pious parishioners – access to the abbey church was strictly reserved for monks and paying pilgrims.

Faubourg de la Chapelle

ARCHITECTURE

A neighbourhood of 17th- and 18th-century houses, near the Abbatiale St-Pierre.

Aventures Dordogne Nature

RIVER CRUISES

(www.adndordogne.org, in French; ☀May-Oct) Runs *gabarre* (flat-bottomed boat – see p583) trips on the picturesque river, ranging from a 1¼-hour spin around Beaulieu (adult/child €6/5) to a 2½-hour gourmet picnic cruise (adult/child €18/13).

Sleeping & Eating

Beaulieu's **market** is on Wednesday and Saturday mornings.

Auberge Les Charmilles

HOTEL €€

(☎05 55 91 29 29; www.auberge-charmilles.com, in French; 20 bd Rodolphe de Turenne; d €75-120; ☎) All eight rooms at this lovely *maison bourgeoise* are named after different types of strawberries. The decor's fresh and fruity, with puffy bedspreads, wooden floors and summery bathrooms. Scrumptious home-cooked dishes are served at its peaceful riverside **restaurant** (menus €19-48), though vegetarians should note the so-called 'vegetarian *menu*' consists entirely of fish dishes.

Manoir de Beaulieu

HOTEL €€

(☎05 55 91 01 34; www.manoirdebeaulieu.com; 4 place du Champ-de-Mars; s €99, d €109-129, ste €169-179; ☎) Half old-fashioned *auberge*, half modern pamper-pad, this smart village-centre hotel is a find. The rooms mix the best of old and new – stripped wood floors, glass sinks and flat-screen TVs meet solid furniture, velvet armchairs, and the odd cartwheel or reclaimed desk, and the gastronomic courtyard **restaurant** (menus €16-70) is superb.

Auberge de Jeunesse

HOSTEL €

(☎05 55 91 13 82; beaulieu@fuaj.org; place du Monturu; dm €13.50; ☎Apr-Oct) Parts of this quirky 28-bed hostel date from the 15th century, and it certainly looks vintage: latticed windows and a miniature turret decorate the exterior, while inside you'll find a cosy chimney-side lounge, well-stocked kitchen and dinky four-bed rooms, all with private bathrooms.



Camping à la Ferme du Masvidal

CAMPGROUND €

(☎05 55 91 53 14; www.masvidal.fr; bd de Turenne; sites from €6.50, d incl breakfast €55; ☎Apr-Sep; ☎) In addition to shady sites where you can watch the animals roam at this working farm 7km southwest of Beaulieu, there are also three sloped-ceilinged *chambre d'hôte* (B&B) rooms and hearty home-cooked meals (*menus* €12 to €20) made with produce from the property.

Camping des Îles

CAMPGROUND €

(☎05 55 91 02 65; www.camping-des-iles.fr; bd de Turenne; sites €10.90-26.90; ☎Apr-Oct; ☎) Shady camp on an island sandwiched between two branches of the Dordogne.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎05 55 91 09 94; www.beaulieu-tourisme.com; place Marbot; ☎9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun) is on the main square.

Getting There & Away

From Monday to Saturday buses link Beaulieu with Brive (€2, one hour, one to three daily).

THE DORDOGNE

With its rich food, heady history and rolling countryside strewn with countless historic castles, the Dordogne has long been a favourite place of escape for second-homing Brits and French families on *les grandes vacances*. But the castle-builders weren't the first to settle on the riverbanks; Cro-Magnon man was here long before, and the Vézère Valley shelters the most spectacular series of prehistoric cave paintings anywhere in Europe.

Better known to the French as the Périgord, the Dordogne *département* is divided into four colour-coded areas for easy navigation: Périgord Blanc (white) after the limestone hills around the capital, Périgueux; Périgord Pourpre (purple) for the wine-growing regions around Bergerac; Périgord Vert (green) for the forested regions of the northwest; and Périgord Noir (black) for the dark oak forests around the Vézère Valley and Sarlat-la-Canéda.

Périgueux

POP 30,808

There's been a settlement on the site of present-day Périgueux for over 2000 years. Initially occupied by Gallic tribes, and later developed by the Romans into the city of Vesunna, Périgueux is still the biggest (and busiest) commercial centre of the Dordogne *département*. But reminders of its lengthy history abound: Roman ruins remain in the Cité quarter, while medieval buildings and Renaissance mansions are dotted around the rabbit-warren old town, Puy St-Front.



Sights

PUY ST-FRONT

Cathédrale St-Front

CATHEDRAL

(place de la Clautre; ☎8am-12.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm) Périgueux' most distinctive landmark is most notable for its five Byzantine bump-studded domes (inspired by either



St Mark's Basilica in Venice or the church of the Holy Apostles of Constantinople, depending on whom you ask). Built in the 12th century, and heavily restored by Abadie (the architect of Paris' Sacré Cœur), the interior is laid out in a Greek cross, with the soaring domes supported by svelte arches. The carillon sounds the same on-the-hour chime as Big Ben.

The best views of the cathedral are from **Pont des Barris**, which crosses the River Isle to the east.

Medieval & Renaissance Architecture

ARCHITECTURE

North of the cathedral, Périgueux' broad boulevards give way to a tangle of cobblestone streets lined with haphazard houses: the best examples are along **rue du Plan-tier**, **rue de la Sagesse** and **rue de la Miséricorde**. **Rue Limogeanne** has graceful Renaissance buildings at Nos 3 and 12, and the elaborately carved **Maison du Pâtissier** is at the end of rue Éguillerie. Most impressive of all is the **Hôtel d'Abzac de Ladouze** (16 rue Aubergerie), which was a fortified mer-

chant's house in the 15th century. Of the 28 towers that formed Puy St-Front's medieval fortifications, only the 15th-century Tour Mataguerre, a stout, round bastion next to the tourist office, now remains. The tourist office supplies a street map detailing the city's other architectural sites.

Puy St-Front has a couple of worthwhile museums.

Musée du Périgord

MUSEUM

(22 cours Tourny; adult/child €4.50/2.50;

☎10.30am-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun) Archaeological finds include some fine Roman mosaics and unique examples of prehistoric scrimshaw.

Musée Militaire

MILITARY MUSEUM

(32 rue des Farges; adult/child €4/free; ☎2-6pm Mon-Sat) Eclectic collection of swords, firearms, uniforms and insignia dating from the Middle Ages until WWII, with sections devoted to WWI and the French Resistance.

LA CITÉ

Roman Ruins

ROMAN RUINS

Périgueux (or Vesunna, to give it its Roman name) was among the most important cities in Roman Gaul, but the only remains of this once-thriving outpost are in La Cité, west of the city centre. The **Tour de Vésone**, the last remaining section of a massive Gallo-Roman temple dedicated to the Gaulish goddess Vesunna, is just south of the **Église St-Étienne de la Cité** (place de la Cité), which served as Périgueux' cathedral until 1669.

Roman Amphitheatre

ROMAN RUINS

To the north of the Tour de Vésone are the ruins of the city's Roman amphitheatre, designed to hold over 30,000 baying spectators and one of the largest such structures in Gaul: today only a few creeper-covered arches remain, and its gladiatorial arena is occupied by a peaceful park, the **Jardins des Arènes**.

Musée Gallo-Romain Vesunna

ROMAN VILLA

(www.vesunna.fr, in French; rue Claude Bernard; adult/child €6/4; ☎9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Sat & Sun) Just west of the Tour de Vésone is the museum constructed by French architect Jean Nouvel above a 1st-century Roman villa uncovered in 1959. Light floods in through the glass-and-steel structure, and walkways circumnavigate the excavated villa; it's still

Périgueux

📍 Top Sights

Cathédrale St-Front.....	E3
Hôtel d'Abzac de Ladouze.....	E4
Musée du Périgord.....	F1
Roman Amphitheatre.....	A3

📍 Sights

1 Église St-Étienne de la Cité.....	B4
2 Jardin des Arènes.....	A3
3 Maison du Pâtissier.....	E2
4 Musée Militaire.....	E3
5 Tour Mataguerre.....	D3

🏠 Sleeping

6 Hôtel de l'Univers.....	D2
7 Hôtel des Barris.....	G3

🍴 Eating

8 Au Bien Bon.....	E3
9 Au Petit Chef.....	E2
10 Café de la Place.....	E2
11 Covered Market.....	E2
12 La Ferme Périgourdine.....	E2
13 Le Clos St-Front.....	F2
14 Le Cocoon.....	D2
15 L'Eden.....	E4
16 L'Estaminet.....	E2

🎬 Entertainment

17 CAP Cinéma.....	C4
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LAND OF 1001 CHÂTEAUX

During the Hundred Years War the Dordogne marked the frontier between French and English forces, and the area is sometimes known as the 'Land of 1001 Châteaux' due to its abundance of historic castles. The impervious fortifications of the châteaux of the Dordogne were rarely necessary as frontal assaults were too costly in terms of money and manpower; they were defeated more often through machiavellian intrigue than brute force.

Many of the Dordogne's châteaux can be visited; our favourites include the following:

Château de Biron (p584) South of Monpazier. An eight-century-long evolution incorporating wildly varying architectural styles.

Puymartin (p571) Northwest of Sarlat-la-Canéda. Atmospheric (and allegedly haunted) turret-topped château.

Château de Losse (p580) Southwest of Montignac. Surrounded by an original 15th-century moat.

Château de Beynac (p582) Above the village of Beynac-et-Cazenac, northwest of La Roque Gageac. Mighty fortress with dizzying views along the Dordogne.



Château de Castelnaud (p582) Southwest of La Roque Gageac. Formidable former English stronghold with a museum of medieval warfare.

possible to make out the central fountain, supporting pillars and the underfloor hypo-caust system, as well as original mosaic murals, jewellery, pottery and even a water pump.

Tours

The tourist office runs a range of French-language **guided tours** (adult/child €6/4.50) around the old city, including a Gallo-Roman tour and a walk around Puy St-Front's medieval and Renaissance buildings.

Sleeping

Château des Reynats CASTLE HOTEL €€€
(05 53 03 53 59; www.chateau-hotel-perigord.com; 15 av des Reynats, Chancelade; d in chateau €190-260, in orangerie €96;   Périgueux proper doesn't have any top-end hotels but if you head 3km west you'll find this stately property with flowing guestrooms in the château, as well as simpler rooms in the adjacent orangerie. In addition to lavish dining (lunch *menu* €28, *menus* €39 to €75), Reynats hosts gourmet weekends and other foodie events.

Hôtel des Barris HOTEL €
(05 53 53 04 05; www.hoteldesbarris.com; 2 rue Pierre-Magne; s €47-49, d €53-55;  ) Beside the broad River Isle with a cute waterside terrace, this Logis hotel is the best value in Périgueux as long as you can get a river-view room (the ones by the main

road can be hideously noisy). Rooms at the higher end of the modest price scale have air-conditioning.

Hôtel de l'Univers

HOTEL €

(05 53 53 34 79; www.hotelrestaurantunivers.fr; 18 cours Michel Montaigne; s/d from €50/58; ) You won't get more central than the Univers, perched above Le Cercle, a swanky little wine bar and brasserie in old Périgueux. Nine fresh, unfussy rooms, most redecorated with soothing shades and the odd rustic curio, are dotted round the upstairs floors; the streetside ones are the quietest.

Bristol Hôtel

HOTEL €€

(05 53 08 75 90; www.bristolfrance.com; 37-39 rue Antoine Gadaud; s €60-69, d €66-78;   ) Look past the Bristol's boxy Lego-brick facade and you'll find traditionally styled rooms with wooden furniture, rich shades of orange, peach and red, and extras including free parking.



Eating



Le Clos St-Front GASTRONOMIC €€€
(05 53 46 78 58; www.leclosaintfront.com; 12 rue St-Front; menus €20-62; ) Set around a lime-shaded garden beside a 16th-century *hôtel particulier*, the city's *grande table* is a delight from start to finish: chef and owner Patrick Feuga has a well-earned reputation for his imaginative versions of

traditional dishes, which range from goose breast with cardamom sauce to sashimi bream and 'hot-and-cold' caramel soufflé. The buzzy courtyard patio is *the* place to eat out in summer, so you'll need military precision to bag a table.

Au Bien Bon

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(☎05 53 09 69 91; 15 rue des Places; lunch/ dinner menus €10.50/22; ☺lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Checked tablecloths, chalkboard menus and chipped floor tiles set the earthy tone at this rustic place, which makes a fine spot for traditional Périgord cooking: *confit de canard* (duck leg, cured and poached in its own fat), *omelette aux cèpes* (omelette with porcini mushrooms) or full-blown *tête de veau* (vealer's head).

Café de la Place

CAFÉ, BRASSERIE €€

(☎05 53 08 21 11; 7 place du Marché au Bois; mains €14-21) This marvellous streetside café on place du Marché au Bois, with its spinning ceiling fans, shiny brass fittings and smoke-burnished wooden bar is really a place to sit and people-watch over a *petit café*, but there are good brasserie standards if you're peckish, as well as a decadent *café gourmand* (coffee with miniature desserts).

L'Estaminet

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(☎05 53 06 11 38; 2 Impasse Limogeanne; lunch mains €15-18, dinner menus €18-26; ☺lunch daily, dinner Tue, Thu & Fri) Secreted in a medieval courtyard, this intimate bistro takes its culinary cue from the daily produce available at the nearby market, so you could find anything from fresh sea bass to rump steak on the menu, all with a Périgordine twist.

Au Petit Chef

BISTRO €€

(☎05 53 53 16 03; 5 place du Coderc; lunch/dinner menus €13.50/24; ☺Mon-Sat) All the ingredients at this kitsch little bistro come straight from the covered market opposite, so you're guaranteed fresh flavours and authentic *plats régionaux*. It's popular at lunchtime, especially on market days, so pitch up early.

Vegetarians should check out the following:

Le Cocoon

VEGETARIAN €

(☎05 53 53 63 35; 9 place St-Silain; menus €10-15; ☺lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Mon-Fri; ☎) The rarest of breeds in the Périgord: an exclusively vegetarian restaurant, with a bohemian dining room spilling onto a sociable umbrella-shaded terrace.

L'Eden

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(☎05 53 06 31 08; www.leden-restaurant.com, in French; 3 rue Aubergerie; menus €10-15; ☺lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Mon-Fri; ☎) Serves beautifully presented dishes like apple-and-foie-gras tart but staff happily cater for vegetarians if you ask.

Self-Catering

Périgueux' chaotic **street markets** explode into action on Wednesday and Saturday, taking over place de la Clautre, place de la Mairie and place du Coderc, where you'll also find the **covered market** (☺to 1.30pm). Liveliest of all are the **Marchés de Gras**, when local delicacies such as truffles, wild mushrooms and foie gras are sold on place St-Louis from mid-November to mid-March.

The old city is crammed with shops selling local gourmet goodies; for fabulous cheeses stop by **La Ferme Périgourdine** (9 rue Limogeanne).



Entertainment

Nightlife is not Périgueux' forte but the 10-screen **CAP Cinéma** (www.cap-cine.fr, in French; place Francheville) shows mainly new-release films, some in *version originale* (nondubbed).



Information

Espace Tourisme Périgord (☎05 53 35 50 24; 25 rue du Président Wilson; ☎8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Information on the Dordogne département.

Post office (1 rue du 4 Septembre)

Tourist office (☎05 53 53 10 63; www.tourisme-perigueux.fr; 26 place Francheville; ☎9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sun)



Getting There & Away

BUS The main local operator is **Peribus** (www.peribus.fr, in French); single fares around town cost €1.25.

Further afield, **Trans Périgord** (www.transbus.org, in French) serves destinations including Sarlat (1½ hours, two daily Monday to Friday), Montignac (one hour 40 minutes, one daily Monday to Friday) and Bergerac (70 minutes, six daily Monday to Friday). Tickets cost a flat rate of €2 per adult, €1 child.

CAR The major car-hire agencies are around the train station.

TRAIN The **train station** (rue Denis Papin), 1km northwest of the old city, is served by buses 1, 4 and 5. Direct services run to Bordeaux (€19.10, 1½ hours, 18 daily), Limoges (€15, one hour, 15

TRUFFLE CAPITAL

While the Dordogne is famed for its gourmet goodies, for true culinary connoisseurs there's only one ingredient that matters: the black truffle, often dubbed the *diamant noir* (black diamond) or, hereabouts, the *perle noire du Périgord* (the black pearl of Périgord).

A subterranean fungus that grows naturally in chalky soils (in the Dordogne around the roots of oak trees), this mysterious little mushroom is notoriously capricious; a good truffle spot one year can be inexplicably bare the next, which has made farming them on any kind of serious scale practically impossible. The art of truffle-hunting is a closely guarded secret; it's a matter of luck, judgment and hard-earned experience, with specially trained dogs (and sometimes even pigs) to help in the search. Simple dishes like a plain omelette or sliced onto fresh crusty bread bring out their strong flavour, but they're used by skilful chefs in an infinite array of dishes. It's not simply a matter of culinary perfection; truffles are seriously big business, with a vintage crop fetching as much as €1000 a kilogram at the markets, and infinitely more in shops.

The height of truffle season is between December and March, when special truffle markets are held around the Dordogne, including Périgueux, Sarlat and most notably the small village of **Sorges** (population 1234), locally championed as the 'world's truffle capital'.

You can discover the secrets of Sorges' truffles at its **Ecomusée de la Truffe** (☎05 53 05 90 11; www.ecomusee-truffe-sorges.com; Le Bourg, Sorges; adult/child €4/2; ☼10am-noon & 2-5pm, closed Mon Oct-Jan), which has lots of truffle-themed exhibits and may be able to help you hook up with a truffle hunt in season. Alternatively, contact **La Truffe Noire de Sorges** (☎06 08 45 09 48; www.truffe-sorges.com; 1½hr tours €10; ☼by reservation Dec-Feb & Jun-Sep), which runs tours of *truffières* (the areas where truffles are cultivated), followed by a tasting.

Auberge de la Truffe (☎05 53 05 02 05; www.auberge-de-la-truffe.com, in French; Sorges; s €52-105, d €56-120; ☼☼☼), in the village centre, has stylish rooms in shades such as crimson and sky blue, and is renowned throughout the Dordogne for its **restaurant** (menus €23-57) serving sensational seasonal cuisine including an all-truffle menu (€100) with truffle pastries for dessert.

Sorges is 23km northeast of Périgueux on the N21.

daily) and Brive-la-Gaillarde (€11.80, one hour, six to eight daily). Fewer trains run on Sunday.

Getting to Sarlat-la-Canéda (€13.90, 1¼ hours, three daily) requires a change at Le Buisson.

Brantôme

POP 2169

With its five medieval bridges arcing over the River Dronne, lined by romantic riverfront architecture, Brantôme certainly befits its moniker 'Venice of the Périgord', albeit on a diminutive scale. Surrounded by grassy parks and willow-filled woodland, it's an enchanting spot to while away an afternoon or embark on a boat ride.

👁 Sights & Activities

Brantôme's most illustrious landmark is the former **Benedictine Abbey**, built and rebuilt from the 11th to 18th centuries and

now occupied by the Hôtel de Ville. Next door is the Gothic **abbey church** and the tourist office.

Behind the modern-day abbey and the tourist office are the remains of Brantôme's original abbey, known as the **Parcours Troglodytique** (adult/child €4/2; ☼10am-6pm), cut from the rock face by industrious monks in the 8th century. Its most famous feature is a 15th-century rock **frieze** supposedly depicting the Last Judgement. The abbey's 11th-century Romanesque **clocher** (belltower) is allegedly the oldest – and arguably most beautiful – in France.

Pleasure boats depart from the banks of the river in front of the abbey, including **Promenade en Bateau** (☎05 53 04 74 71; adult/child €7/5) and **L'Arche de Noël** (adult/child €7/5). Cruises last about 50 minutes, with up to six trips per day from April to mid-October.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostellerie les Griffons

HOTEL, B&B €€

(☎05 53 45 45 35; www.griffons.fr; Bourdeilles; d €87-110; ☎) River views extend from the blue-shuttered windows of this fantastically atmospheric converted mill. The rooms are an enticing jumble of medieval fireplaces, head-scraping beams and port-hole windows – ask for No 6, with its ceiling of muddled crossbeams, or No 2, with stone hearth and town views. There are good deals on half board at its riverside **restaurant** (menus from €29.50; ☎lunch Sun, dinner daily by reservation), with French doors opening out to the terrace. It's in the nearby town of Bourdeilles, about 9km southwest of Brantôme along the D78.

Maison Fleurie

B&B €€

(☎05 53 35 17 04; www.maison-fleurie.net; 54 rue Gambetta; s €45-50, d €60-90; ☎) Behind the flowering window boxes of this smart stone house are five spick-and-span en-suite rooms (romantics should go for the 'Rose' room, with a four-poster bed) and a sunny interior courtyard filled with geraniums and petunias.

Hostellerie du Périgord Vert

HOTEL €

(☎05 53 05 70 58; www.hotel-hpv.fr; 7 av André Maurois; d €48-55, tr €72; ☎) Creepers cover the outside of this old roadside inn, ranged around a private courtyard set back from the main road and riverfront. The rooms are pleasant in an everyday kind of way, with stout beds, plain bathrooms and a choice of courtyard or pool views. South-west wines and *cuisine de terroir* (country cuisine) make the **restaurant** (menus €18-39) especially popular for Sunday lunch.

Information

Tourist office (☎05 53 05 80 63; www.ville-brantome.fr; ☎10am-6pm)

Getting There & Away

Brantôme is 27km north of Périgueux along the D939. Three **buses** (www.cftaco.fr, in French) a day (one on Sunday) run to/from Périgueux (€2; 50 minutes). The bus stop is outside the *gendarmerie* (police station) in the village centre.

Sarlat-la-Canéda

PDP 9943

A picturesque tangle of honey-coloured buildings, alleyways and secret squares make up Sarlat-la-Canéda. Ringed by forest-

ed hilltops, its heart-shaped Cité Médiévale (medieval town) is home to some of the country's best-preserved architecture from the Middle Ages.

The village's photogenic qualities haven't escaped film directors, with more movies shot here than anywhere else in France apart from Paris and Nice. It's a charming launch pad for exploring the Périgord Noir and the Vézère Valley, but it hasn't escaped the attention of tourists, either: as it's one of the region's most popular destinations, you may find it almost impossible to appreciate its charms among the throngs in high summer.

Sights & Activities

Part of the fun of wandering around Sarlat is losing yourself – literally – in its network of twisting alleyways and back streets. **Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau** or **rue Landry** both make good starting points, but for the grandest buildings and *hôtels particuliers* you'll want to explore **rue des Consuls**. Look out for the medieval fountain, tucked away down steps at the rear of a mossy grotto.

Cathédrale St-Sacerdos

CATHEDRAL

Whichever street you take, sooner or later you'll end up at the cathedral on place du Peyrou, once part of Sarlat's Cluniac abbey. The original abbey church was built in the 1100s, redeveloped in the early 1500s and remodelled again in the 1700s, so it's a real mix of styles. The belfry and western facade are the oldest parts of the building, while the nave, organ and interior chapels are later additions.

Maison de la Boétie

ARCHITECTURE

This 16th-century timber-framed house opposite the cathedral is the birthplace of the writer Étienne de la Boétie (1530–63).

Église Ste-Marie

ARCHITECTURE

A few steps south of place du Marché aux Oies (see p572) is the Église Ste-Marie, ingeniously converted by acclaimed architect Jean Nouvel, whose parents still live in Sarlat. It now not only houses Sarlat's mouthwatering **Marché Couvert** (covered market), but, by the time you read this, a **panoramic lift** (elevator) will have been installed by Nouvel in its belltower. Check with the tourist office for details.

Historic quarter

ARCHITECTURE

Two medieval courtyards, the **Cour des Fontaines** and the **Cour des Chanoines**,

can be reached via an alleyway off rue Tourny. Duck down the passage from Cour des Chanoines to the **Chapelle des Pénitents Bleus**, a Romanesque chapel that provided the architectural inspiration for the cathedral.

Nearby is the **Jardin des Enfeus**, Sarlat's first cemetery, and the rocket-shaped **Lanterne des Morts** (Lantern of the Dead), built to honour a visit by St Bernard, one of the founders of the Cistercian order, in 1147.

Sarlat-la-Canéda



Puymartin

CHÂTEAU

(www.chateau-de-puymartin.com, in French; adult €7, child €3.50-5; ☼10am-noon & 2-6pm) Heading 8km northwest from town brings you to this turreted château with an elegant partly furnished interior that's best known for the mysterious Dame Blanche, whose restless spirit is said to haunt its corridors.

🛏 Sleeping

Hotel rooms in Sarlat in summer are like gold dust, and budget rooms are thin on the ground at any time; shoestringers should ask at the tourist office about *chambres d'hôte*.

Plaza Madeleine & Spa

SPA HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 59 10 41; www.hoteldelamadeleine-sarlat.com; 1 place de la Petite Rigaudie; d €99-149; 🍷🍷🍷) Perfect if you're in need of some pampering, facilities at this statement in luxury include an outdoor jacuzzi, solarium and Finnish sauna. Decorated in autumnal hues, contemporary rooms subtly evoke a bygone era.

Hôtel La Coulevrine

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 59 27 80; www.la-coulevrine.com; 1 place de la Bouquerie; d €56-88; 🍷🍷) Gables, chimneys and red-tile rooftops adorn this rambling hotel, which originally formed part of Sarlat's city wall. It's old, odd and endearingly musty. Strange-shaped rooms are sandwiched between solid stone and wooden rafters, and for maximum quirk factor there are a couple of rooms in the hotel's turret. Dine by the enormous fireplace in the 13th-century hall housing its **restaurant** (menus €19-32).

Hôtel Les Récollets

HOTEL €

(☎05 53 31 36 00; www.hotel-recollets-sarlat.com; 4 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau; d €45-69; 🍷🍷🍷) Lost in the medieval maze of the old town, the Récollets is a budget beauty. Nineteen topsy-turvy rooms and a charming vaulted breakfast room are rammed in around the medieval *maison*. Our favourites are 305 and 308, with exposed brick and king-size beds.

Clos La Boétie

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎05 53 29 44 18; www.closlaboetie-sarlat.com; 95-97 av de la Selves; d €210-280, ste €300-340; 🍷🍷🍷) Each of the 11 rooms at this 19th-century mansion is a jewel, right down to the high-thread-count linen and supersoft pillows. Some have terraces and all come with hydromassage showers and balneotherapy (water healing) baths to soothe travel-weary bodies. It's a five-minute walk north of the Cité Médiévale.

Hôtel St-Albert

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 31 55 55; www.hotel-santalbert.eu; place Pasteur; d from €60; 🍷) At this pared back, stylish hotel with the barest of boutique touches, individually decorated rooms in chocolate-and-cream tones and posh bath goodies make it feel closer to a metropolitan crash pad than an old-town *auberge*.

Villa des Consuls

B&B €€

(☎05 53 31 90 05; www.villaconsuls.fr; 3 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau; d €87-98, apt €98-175; 🍷🍷) Despite its Renaissance exterior, the four huge rooms and summer-only self-catering apartments here are modern through and through. Some have wood floors, tall windows, sofas and original beams; others are tucked into the attic with split-level staircases, nook-and-canny windows and lofty ceilings.

Sarlat-la-Canéda**📍 Top Sights**

Cathédrale St-Sacerdos.....	C4
Église Ste-Marie.....	C2

📍 Sights

1 Chapelle des Pénitents Bleus.....	C4
2 Cour des Chanoines.....	C4
3 Cour des Fontaines.....	C5
4 Geese statue.....	B2
5 Lanterne des Morts.....	D4
6 Maison de la Boétie.....	B4

🛏 Sleeping

7 Hôtel La Coulevrine.....	D1
8 Hôtel Les Récollets.....	A2
9 Hôtel St-Albert.....	C6
10 Villa des Consuls.....	A2

🍷 Eating

11 Chez Le Gaulois.....	C4
12 Criqueetamu's.....	A1
13 Distillerie du Périgord.....	B3
14 Julien de Savignac.....	C6
15 Le Bistrot.....	C4
16 Le Présidial.....	D3
17 Le Quatre Saisons.....	A3
18 Marché Couvert.....	C2

🍷 Drinking

19 Café Lébèrou.....	A2
20 Le Pub.....	C2

WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE GOOSE

A life-size **statue** of three gold-hued, bronze-sculpted geese in the centre of **place du Marché aux Oies** (Geese Market) attests to the enduring economic and gastronomic role of the birds in these parts. Sarlat's covered and outdoor markets sell a smorgasbord of goose-based goodies and restaurants serve up all manner of goose dishes including *grillons* (coarse-textured pâté), *magret* (breast), *aiguillettes* (fine slivers of magret) and *civet* (stew).

Gaggles of live geese fill the city during the **Fest'Oie** (goose festival) on the third Sunday in February, accompanied by stalls, music and a banquet prepared by Sarlat's top chefs.

Hôtel Le Mas de Castel BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(02 05 53 53 59 02 59; www.hotel-lemasdec Castel.com; route du Sudalissant; d €65-75; @ ☎ ☎) This former farmhouse 3km south of town makes a delightful escape from the hectic hum of central Sarlat. Some of its 14 sunny rooms open to the flower-filled courtyard and pool, and one has self-catering facilities.

Hôtel Altica HOTEL €

(02 05 53 28 18 00; www.altica.fr; av de la Dordogne; d €42-44; ☎) Situated 1.5km south of Sarlat, this ochre-coloured hotel – part of a small southwestern France chain – definitely isn't big on character. But it is about the cheapest option around, with rooms sleeping up to three people for the same flat rate.

**Eating**

Sarlat isn't short on restaurants, but many are more concerned with packing in tourists whose loyalty they don't have to earn, rather than tempting tastebuds to return. Choose wisely.

Bistro de l'Octroi REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(02 05 53 30 83 40; www.lebistrodeloctroi.fr, in French; 111 av de Selves; menus €18-26) This locals' tip is a little way out of town, but don't let that dissuade you. Sarladais pack into this cosy town house for the artistically presented, accomplished cooking that doesn't sacrifice substance for style. Top choices are the generous slabs of Limousin beef and sublime seafood; if you can't decide on dessert, go for the *symphonie* with small portions of several.

Le Grand Bleu GASTRONOMIC €€€

(02 05 53 29 82 14; www.legrandbleu.eu, in French; 43 av de la Gare; menus €33-90; ☎ lunch Thu-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat; ☎) Near the train station, every menu at this Michelin-starred temple to fine dining includes a choice of meat (like

veal sweetbreads with truffles) or seafood (such as lobster risotto with roast eggplant and truffle mousse), with a '*petit gourmet*' menu for little gourmands, and an upcoming program of cooking courses.

Le Présidial REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(02 05 53 28 92 47; 6 rue Landry; menus from €29; ☎ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Mon-Sat Apr-Nov) Housed in one of Sarlat's most historic buildings (originally a 17th-century courthouse), Le Présidial's stout gates swing back to reveal the city's most romantic terrace, filled with summer flowers and climbing ivy – the perfect place to sit back and enjoy authentic *saveurs de terroir* (country flavours). Goose, duck and foie gras dominate the changing menu, and the wine list is super, especially for Sarlat and Cahors vintages.

Le Bistrot REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(02 05 53 28 28 40; place du Peyrou; menus €18.50-24.50; ☎ Mon-Sat) This diminutive bistro is the best of the bunch on café-clad place du Peyrou. Red-check tablecloths and twinkling fairy lights create an intimate atmosphere, and the menu's heavy on Sarlat classics – especially walnuts, *magret de canard* (duck breast) and *pommes sarladaises* (potatoes cooked in duck fat).

Le Quatre Saisons REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(02 05 53 29 48 59; www.4saisons-sarlat-perigord.com, in French; 2 côte de Toulouse; menus from €19; ☎ Thu-Sun; ☎) Tucked off a steep street in the Cité Médiévale. The father-and-son team behind this intimate restaurant use whatever's freshest at the markets to inspire inventive dishes accompanied by a surprisingly international wine list.

Criquetamus's INTERNATIONAL €€

(02 05 53 29 48 59; www.criquetamus.fr, in French; 5 rue des Armes; menus €19-35; ☎ Tue-Sun Mar-Oct; ☎) Searching out this chic little

spot – hidden away in the Cité Médiévale – rewards with ‘world platters’ including Japanese, island (with banana curry) and Western (gourmet hamburgers), as well as local flavours.

Chez Le Gaulois

SAVOYARD €

(☎05 53 59 50 64; 3 rue Tourny; mains €9-13; ☺Tue-Sat) Stonking plates of smoked sausage, cold meats and cheese are served up on wooden platters at this Alpine-style *auberge* as well as authentic *tartiflettes* (cheese, potato and meat gratin).

Self-Catering

Practically every other shop in Sarlat is stocked with local goodies, from *confit de canard* (duck confit) to walnut cake.

Marché Couvert

COVERED MARKET €

(☎8.30am-2pm) Inside the converted Église Ste-Marie, this is the best place for supplies from local producers.

Saturday market

MARKET €

(place de la Liberté & rue de la République; ☎8.30am-6pm Sat) For the full-blown French market experience, you absolutely mustn't miss Sarlat's chaotic Saturday market, which takes over the streets around the cathedral. Depending on the season, delicacies on offer include local mushrooms, duck- and goose-based products such as foie gras, and even the holy *truffe noir* (black truffle).

Fruit & vegetable market

MARKET €

(☎8.30am-1pm Wed) This smaller market is held on place de la Liberté.

Other good shops:

Distillerie du Périgord

LIQUEUR €

(place de la Liberté) For local liqueurs.

Julien de Savignac

WINE €

(place Pasteur)



Drinking

Sarlat's drinking scene is pretty limited. Closing times vary widely according to the season. Best options:

Le Pub

BAR

(1 passage de Gérard du Barry; ☺daily) The enclosed courtyard springs to life with alfresco drinkers in summer.

Café Lébèrou

BAR

(5 rue Jean Jacques Rousseau; ☺Tue-Sat) A local hang-out, with great cocktails.

i Information

There are several banks along rue de la République, all with ATMs.

Post office (place du 14 Juillet) Currency exchange.

Tourist office (☎05 53 31 45 45; www.sarlat-tourisme.com; rue Tourny; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sun)

i Getting There & Away

Sarlat's train station is 1.3km south of the old city along av de la Gare. Destinations include Périgueux (change at Le Buisson; €13.90, 1¼ hours, three daily), Les Eyzies (change at Le Buisson; €8.60, 50 minutes to 2½ hours depending on connections, three daily) and Bergerac (€11.20, 2½ hours, six daily), as well as a direct service to Bordeaux (€23.90, 2¾ hours, seven daily).

i Getting Around

BICYCLE Bikes can be hired for around €12 for half a day from **Cycles Sarladais** (☎05 53 28 50 08; www.cycles-sarladais.com, in French; 16 av Aristide Briande), near the train station, and **Cycleo** (☎05 53 31 90 05; www.cycleo.fr; 44 rue des Cordeliers).

CAR Cars are banned in the Cité Médiévale from June to September, and rue de la République (La Traverse), the main street which bisects the Cité Médiévale, is pedestrianised in July and August. There's no free parking in Sarlat-la-Canéda.

The Vézère Valley

Flanked by limestone cliffs, subterranean caverns and ancient woodland, the Vézère Valley is world famous for its prehistoric sites, notably its incredible collection of cave paintings – the highest concentration of Stone Age art found in Europe. The many underground caves around the Vézère provided shelter for Cro-Magnon people, and the area is littered with tangible reminders of their time here. The otherworldly atmosphere is pretty much shattered by the summer crowds and most of the valley's sites are closed in winter, so spring and autumn are definitely the best times to visit.

Most of the key sites are around the towns of Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil and Montignac, which are both well set up for visitors. Nearby Sarlat-la-Canéda, between the Vézère and Dordogne valleys to the west, is also a convenient base for exploring this part of the Dordogne.

i Getting Around

Public transport is limited, with few trains and even fewer buses. They will get you to most towns but there's usually no transport provided to the caves themselves. Cycling is an option, and hire bikes are often available from campsites, some hotels and rental outlets (ask at tourist offices) but, as always in rural France, having your own car makes things infinitely easier.

LES EYZIES-DE-TAYAC-SIREUIL & AROUND

POP 860

At the heart of the Vézère Valley, Les Eyzies itself makes a fairly uninspiring introduction to the wonders of the Vézère, with postcard sellers and souvenir shops lining the main street. Still, the town has some pleasant hotels and campgrounds and an excellent museum of prehistory, and many major sites are within a short drive.

Sights

LES EYZIES TOWN

Musée National de Préhistoire

PREHISTORY MUSEUM

(www.musee-prehistoire-eyzies.fr, in French; 1 rue du Musée adult/child €5/free, 1st Sun of month free; ☎9.30am-6pm Wed-Mon) Inside a marvellous modern building underneath the cliffs, this museum provides a fine prehistory primer (providing your French is good), housing the most comprehensive collection of prehistoric finds in France. Highlights include a huge gallery of Stone Age tools, weapons and jewellery, and skeletons of some of the animals that once roamed the Vézère (including bison, woolly rhinoceros, giant deer and cave bears), as well as a collection of carved reliefs on the 1st floor – look out for an amazing frieze of horses and a bison licking its flank. Much of the jewellery is fashioned from bone, antlers and seashells, and intricately marked with chevrons, dots, dashes and other designs.

Vézère & Dordogne Valleys



EARLY ARTISTS OF THE VÉZÈRE

If you're visiting the cave paintings around the Vézère, it helps to know a little about the prehistoric artists who created them. Most of the valley's cave paintings date from the end of the last ice age, between 20,000 BC and 10,000 BC, and were painted by Cro-Magnon people – descendants of the first *Homo erectus* settlers who arrived in Europe from North Africa between 700,000 BC and 100,000 BC. These early humans were an entirely separate species from the shorter, burlier Neanderthals who lived in Europe around the same time and died out suddenly around 35,000 BC.

Until around 20,000 BC much of northern Europe was still covered by vast glaciers and ice sheets: Cro-Magnon people lived a loose hunter-gatherer lifestyle, using natural caves as temporary hunting shelters while they followed the migration routes of their prey (including woolly mammoths, woolly rhinoceros, reindeer and aurochs, an ancestor of the modern cow).

The earliest known cave art in the area is from the so-called Gravettian period, consisting of abstract engravings or paintings of female genitalia or 'Venus' figures and developing into complex animal figures and friezes such as those at Lascaux, Rouffignac and Font de Gaume, which date from around 15,000 BC to 10,000 BC. Curiously, the artwork in more recent caves is often less sophisticated than the ones at Lascaux, suggesting that different tribes had differing traditions and levels of artistry, but also indicating that Lascaux seems to have held an unusual significance for its painters. As well as the paintings, these early artists also created jewellery from shells, bones and antlers, and scrimshaw decorated with animal scenes and geometric patterns.

The paintings seem to have come to an abrupt halt around 10,000 BC, around the same time the last ice sheets disappeared and humans hereabouts settled down to a more fixed lifestyle of farming and agriculture.

Abri Pataud

PREHISTORIC SITE

(www.mnhn.fr, in French; 20 rue du Moyen Âge; adult/child €5/3; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm Sun-Thu) About 250m north of the Musée National de Préhistoire is this Cro-Magnon *abri* (shelter) inhabited over a period of 15,000 years starting some 37,000 years ago, displaying bones and other excavated artefacts. The ibex carved into the ceiling dates from about 19,000 BC. The admission price includes a one-hour guided tour (some available in English).

EAST OF LES EYZIES

Grotte de Font de Gaume

PREHISTORIC SITE

(☎05 53 06 86 00; <http://eyzies.monuments-nationaux.fr>; adult/child €7/free; ☀9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Sun-Fri) An astounding testament to the breadth and complexity of prehistoric art, this extraordinary cave 1km northeast of Les Eyzies on the D47 contains the only original 'polychrome' (as opposed to single-colour) paintings still open to the public. About 14,000 years ago, the prehistoric artists created the gallery of over 230 figures, including bison, reindeer, horses, mammoths, bears and wolves, although only about 25 are on permanent display. Look out for the famous **Chapelle des Bisons**, a scene of courting reindeer and stunningly realised

horses, several caught in mid-movement. Font de Gaume is such a rare and valuable site that there is ongoing talk of the cave being closed for its own protection. Visitor numbers are already limited to 200 per day: it's worth reserving by phone or through the tourist office a few days ahead, and a week or two in advance from July to September. The 45-minute guided tours are generally in French; ask about the availability of English tours when you book.

Grotte des Combarelles

PREHISTORIC SITE

(☎05 53 06 86 00; <http://eyzies.monuments-nationaux.fr>; adult/child €7/free; ☀9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Sun-Fri) Rediscovered in 1901, this narrow cave 1.5km east of Font de Gaume is renowned for its animal engravings, many of which cleverly use the natural contours of the rock to sculpt the animals' forms: the most impressive examples are delicately drawn mammoths, horses and reindeer, as well as a fantastic mountain lion that seems to leap from the rock face. One wall seems to have been used as a kind of prehistoric sketchpad, with many animals and geometric symbols superimposed on one another. Six- to eight-person group tours last about an hour and can be

Vézère Valley Cave Art

France is renowned for its art – including some of the earliest in European history.

Deep in the Vézère Valley, prehistoric Cro-Magnon artists worked by the light of primitive oil torches, using flint tools for engraving, natural fibre brushes, pads or sponges for painting, and paints derived from minerals like magnesium and charcoal (black), ochre (red/yellow) and iron (red). Usually they painted the animals they hunted, though occasionally left hand-tracings or depicted abstract figures and scenes such as the picture of an injured hunter and bull at Lascaux. But the Cro-Magnon artists' motives remain a mystery.

Some clues come from what they *didn't* draw. There are no landscapes, trees, rivers, skies or rocks in any of the Vézère's caves – only animals, suggesting that the paintings had some kind of ritual or shamanic significance, possibly indicating shrines or sanctuaries. Most mysterious of all are the geometric shapes common to all the caves. Theories range from primitive writing to magic markers, though no one actually knows what they signified.

Head to some of the valley's extraordinary art sites and ponder these theories yourself.

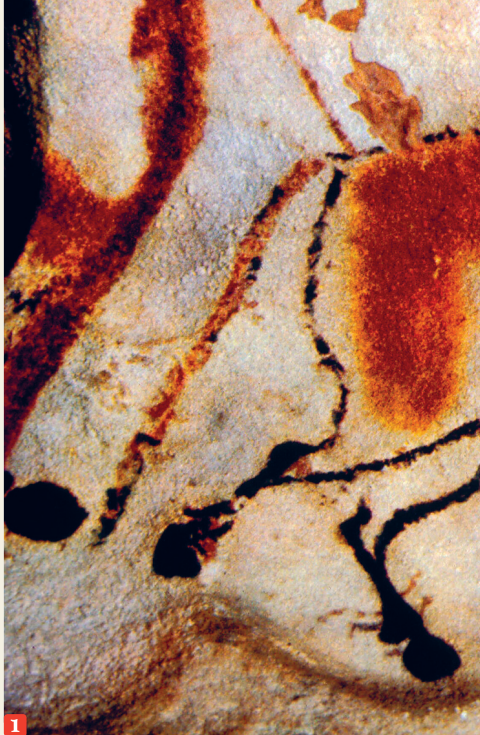
TOP CAVES FOR VIEWING ART

- » **Grotte de Lascaux** (p579) Breathtaking re-creations of the Vézère's most ornate cave art
- » **Grotte de Rouffignac** (p578) Renowned for its frieze of mammoths, one of the largest cave paintings ever discovered
- » **Grotte de Font de Gaume** (p575) The only original polychrome (multicolour) paintings still open
- » **Abri du Cap Blanc** (p578) Flint-carved sculptures

Clockwise from top left

1. Painting at the Grotte de Lascaux **2.** Mammoths of the Grotte de Rouffignac **3.** Detail of bull's head, Grotte de Lascaux.

ROBERT HARDING PICTURE LIBRARY LTD/ALAMY



1

CHRIS HOWES/WILD PLACES PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY



3



2

reserved through the Font de Gaume ticket office.

Abri du Cap Blanc

PREHISTORIC SITE

(☎05 53 06 86 00; <http://eyzies.monuments-nationaux.fr>; adult/child €7/free; ☉9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Sun-Fri) While most of the Vézère's caves contain a combination of engravings and paintings, unusually, this rock shelter contains carved sculptures that were hollowed out, shaped and refined using simple flint tools some 14,000 years ago. The **sculpture gallery** of horses, bison and deer occupies about 40m of the natural shelter. It's peacefully situated about 7km east of Les Eyzies.

NORTHWEST OF LES EYZIES

Grotte du Grand Roc

PREHISTORIC SITE

(www.semitour.com; adult/child €8.50/4.50; ☉10am-noon & 2-6 Sun-Fri) Around 3km northwest of Les Eyzies along the D47, this wondrous cave is decorated by a diverse array of glittering stalactites and stalagmites. The admission price includes entry to the adjacent **Abris de Laugerie Basse** rock shelter originally occupied by Cro-Magnon people and still used as a natural shelter until recent times.



Grotte de Rouffignac

PREHISTORIC SITE

(www.grottederouffignac.fr; adult/child €6.30/4; tours in French ☉10-11.30am & 2-5pm) Hidden in woodland 15km north of Les Eyzies, this cave is one of the most complex and rewarding to see in the Dordogne. The massive cavern plunges 10km into the earth through a mind-boggling maze of tunnels and subshafts – luckily, you visit aboard a somewhat ramshackle **electric train**, so there's no chance of getting lost.

Rouffignac is sometimes known as the 'Cave of 100 Mammoths' and you'll see many painted pachyderms on your trip into the underworld, including a frieze of 10 mammoths in procession, one of the largest cave paintings ever discovered. At the end of the tour the train grinds to a halt and you stumble out into a hidden gallery where the entire ceiling is covered in mammoths, ibex, enormous horses, and even a few rhinoceros – some intricately painted, others reduced to simple strokes and lines. Keep your eyes peeled for scratches and hollows on the cave floor, left behind by the long-extinct cave bears who once shared this cave with our prehistoric ancestors. Certainly beats a cat...

Tickets are sold at the cave entrance but can't be reserved in advance so arrive early –

and wrap up warmly as it's chilly below ground.

NORTHEAST OF LES EYZIES

The following sights are situated off the main road linking Les Eyzies with Montignac.

Le Village Troglodytique de la Madeleine

PREHISTORIC SITE

(www.village-la-madeleine.com, in French; adult/child €5.50/3.50; ☉10am-7pm) Cro-Magnons weren't the only ones to use the Vézère's caves for shelter. As in the Loire, many of the area's caves were used for storage, defence or protection as recently as the Middle Ages. In a wooded setting seemingly straight out of a story book, this cave village 8km northeast of Les Eyzies is a prime example. Carved out from the cliff face above the winding Vézère River, the lower level was occupied by prehistoric people 10,000 to 14,000 years ago, while the upper level was used as a fortified village by medieval settlers. Though it's largely ruined, you can still visit the **Ste-Madeleine chapel** (after which the Magdalenian era is named), but most of the archaeological artefacts are at the Musée National de Préhistoire in Les Eyzies.

La Roque St-Christophe

PREHISTORIC SITE

(www.roque-st-christophe.com; adult €7.50, child €3.50-4.50; ☉10am-6.30pm) On a sheer cliff face 80m above the Vézère 9km northeast of Les Eyzies, the commanding position of this 900m-long series of terraces and caves makes a practically unassailable stronghold. No wonder, then, that this troglodytic site has been employed as a natural fortress for almost 50 millennia – initially by Mousterian (Neanderthal) people 50,000 years ago, followed by successive generations until the 16th century. The sweeping views are stunning, though the caverns themselves are largely empty and some of the plastic reconstructions are decidedly lame.



Activities

For a change from the land-based marvels of the Vézère Valley, **Canoës Vallée Vézère** (☎05 53 05 10 11; www.canoesvalleevezere.com; 10 promenade de la Vézère, Les Eyzies; trips €12-22; ☉Apr-Sep) organises canoe and kayak trips from 10km to 26km including minibus transport. A 5km initiation course costs €8; there are also multiday trips staying at campgrounds or hotels.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel des Glycines

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 06 97 07; www.les-glycines-dordogne.com; 4 av de Laugierie; d €112-162, ste 232; 🍷🍷🍷) Les Eyzies' old post house has been converted into this posh pad where Prince Charles once stayed. Plush rooms range from cream-and-check 'Classics' to full-blown private suites, complete with private terrace and garden outlook. (Avoid the 'courtyard rooms' if you can, which overlook the main road out of Les Eyzies.) The hotel's gastronomic **restaurant** (menus from €39) is a suitably pampering affair.

Hôtel Le Cro-Magnon

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 06 97 06; www.hostellerie-cro-magnon.com; 54 av de la Préhistoire; d €75-130; ☺mid-Mar-mid-Nov; 🍷🍷) Though rooms at this 1850-built inn have a modern efficiency (tempered by old-world style), if the walls could talk, they'd tell you of the Cro-Magnon discoveries on the site of the property's outbuildings in 1868, which have made it a popular stop for prehistorians. Dining is good value in the beamed-ceiling **restaurant** (menus from €17).

Hostellerie du Passeur

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 06 97 13; www.hostellerie-du-passeur.com; place de la Mairie; d €92-120, ste €180; ☺Feb-Oct; 🍷🍷) In the middle of Les Eyzies overlooking the meandering Vézère, rooms at this ivy-clad hotel come in 'Charme', 'Elegance' and 'Prestige' categories. The better rooms are worth the cash, with valley views and deep, luxurious beds.

Hôtel des Roches

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 06 96 59; www.roches-les-eyzies.com; 15 av de la Forge; s €60-80, d €75-98; ☺Apr-Nov; 🍷🍷🍷) For a modern feel, try this smart hotel, chunkily constructed from the area's pale stone and decorated in simple pastoral style. The rear rooms overlook the garden and swimming pool, but you'll have to pay for the privilege.

Les Eyzies has lots of campgrounds, but they get heavily oversubscribed so reserve well ahead.

Camping La Rivière

CAMPGROUND €

(☎05 53 06 97 14; www.larivierelesseyzies.com; site from €15.50; 🍷🍷🍷) The nearest campground to Les Eyzies, a stroll west of town beside the river. Handy facilities include a restaurant, bar, laundry and on-site groceries.

Information

Tourist office (☎05 53 06 97 05; www.tourisme-terredecromagnon.com; ☺9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun) Has a small internet kiosk (per 15 minutes €1.50).

Getting There & Away

Les Eyzies is on the D47, 21km west of Sarlat. The train station is 700m north of town, with connections to Périgueux (€7.20, 30 minutes, 10 daily) and Sarlat (change at Le Buisson; €8.60, 50 minutes to 2½ hours depending on connections, three daily).

MONTIGNAC & AROUND

POP 2946

The riverside town of Montignac is most famous for its proximity to the Grottes de Lascaux, which are hidden away on the densely wooded hilltops just outside the town. Huddled along both banks of the Vézère, Montignac is a peaceful, attractive place and makes a less hectic base than Les Eyzies or Sarlat. The old city and commercial centre is on the river's right bank, but you'll find most of the hotels on the left bank around place Tourny.

To get out onto the river, ask at the tourist office about canoe and kayak rental outlets.

Sights

Grotte de Lascaux & Lascaux II

PREHISTORIC SITE

(☎Lascaux II 05 53 51 95 03; www.semitour.com; adult/child €8.80/6, joint ticket with Le Thot €12.50/8.50; ☺9.30am-6pm) France's most famous prehistoric **cave paintings** are at the Grotte de Lascaux, 2km south-east of Montignac. Discovered in 1940 by four teenage boys who were out searching for their lost dog, Lascaux contains a vast network of chambers and galleries adorned with some of the most extraordinary and complex prehistoric paintings ever found. Far from the comparatively crude etchings of some of the Vézère's other caves, Lascaux' paintings are renowned for their astonishing artistry: the 600-strong menagerie of animal figures are depicted in Technicolor shades of red, black, yellow and brown, and range from reindeer, aurochs, mammoths and horses to a monumental 5.5m-long bull, the largest cave drawing ever found. Lascaux is sometimes referred to as the prehistoric equivalent of the Sistine Chapel, and it's a fitting comparison: after a visit in 1940, Picasso allegedly muttered,

PHILIPPE CAMBA: CAVE GUIDE, LASCAUX II

Job

I'm a teacher by profession but I've always been fascinated by prehistory. I originally studied eco-biology and palaeontology, and combine teaching in the winter with my work as a guide in the summer. In the summer season we can have up to 2000 visitors a day at Lascaux, and take up to six tours each. I do tours in English and French and over the years I've learned the names of the colours, animals and the different body parts in Japanese. It helps a lot!

Impressions of Lascaux

Lascaux is a unique place, with over 2000 of the finest polychrome paintings ever discovered, as well as the largest cave painting ever found. Sadly, I've never been able to see the originals. It's amazing to think that these paintings were all done in one go – they never used sketches or drafts because they couldn't rub out their mistakes. They were real artists, who understood perspective, colour and form. In their own way, Lascaux' paintings are just as complex as those of Picasso or van Gogh.

Best Cave Painting Scenes?

For me, the ones that show the animals in mid-movement. They're like prehistoric movies.

'We have invented nothing'. Carbon dating has shown that the paintings are between 15,000 and 17,000 years old. But despite endless discussion and academic study, no one really knows why the prehistoric painters devoted so much time and effort to their creation, or why this particular site seems to have been so important to them.

The original cave was opened to visitors in 1948, and public interest was unsurprisingly massive. But within a few years it became apparent that human breath and body heat was causing irreparable damage to the paintings, and the cave was closed just 15 years later in 1963. In response to public demand, a replica of the most famous sections of the original cave was meticulously re-created a few hundred metres away – a massive undertaking that required the skills of some 20 artists and took over 11 years. Lascaux II was opened in 1983 and, although the idea sounds rather contrived, the reproductions are enormously moving – especially when the lights are turned off and the paintings seem to spring to life in the light of a flickering torch.

There are several guided tours every hour; ask at the ticket office about the availability of tours in languages including English. From April to October, tickets are sold *only* in Montignac at the ticket office next to Montignac's tourist office.

Le Thot

MUSEUM, ANIMAL PARK

(☎05 53 50 70 44; www.semitour.com; adult/child €6.50/4.50, joint ticket with Lascaux €12.50/8.50; ☀10am-6pm) In an effort to bring the prehistoric age to life, Le Thot, 7km southwest of Montignac, places displays about Cro-Magnon life and art alongside real-life animals they depicted, including reindeer, stags, horses, ibex and European bison (plus replicas of now-extinct species like mammoths). Perhaps most interesting, though, are the displays showing the re-creation of the paintings at Lascaux II.

CASTLE, GARDENS

(www.chateaudelosse.com; adult/child €7.50/4; ☀noon-6pm Sun-Fri) An original 15th-century moat and battlements surround this grandly furnished château, 5km southwest of Montignac. Allow time for a fragrant stroll in its ornate gardens.

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office has a list of nearby campgrounds and *chambres d'hôte*.

Hostellerie la Roseraie

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 50 53 92; www.laroseraie-hotel.com; 11 place des Armes; d €90-170; ☀Apr-Oct; 🍷🍷) As its name implies, the highlight of this mansion in Montignac is the gorgeous rose garden, set around box-edged grounds and a palm-tinged pool. Rococo rooms in various shades of rosy pink and sunflower yellow

have solid furniture, sparkling bathrooms and rose garden views. Half board (€100 to €162 per person) is compulsory on weekends in July and August but you'll want to dine here in any case: truffles, chestnuts, pork and guinea fowl find their way on to the seasonal menu, and on warm summer nights the canopy-shaded terrace is the only place to be.

Hôtel de la Grotte

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 51 80 48; www.hoteldelagrotte.fr; place Tourny; d €56-85; 🍷) This unpretentious country *auberge* in the heart of Montignac makes a charming stop as long as you don't mind frilly bedspreads and floral wallpaper. The gingerbread rooms are a little poky (especially the attic ones, huddled in around the roof beams), but they're reasonably priced and quite comfortable. The garden-set tables at its **restaurant** (menus €12.50-32) are delightful for summertime dining; bike hire is available year-round.

Hôtel le Lascaux

HOTEL €

(☎05 53 51 82 81; 109 av Jean-Jaurès; d €46-67; 🍷🍷) Candy-cane awnings and climbing ivy decorate the front of this family-owned place on the main road to Lascaux, 300m from Montignac's town centre. It's relaxed and unfussy, with snug, simple rooms, some with striped wallpaper and wooden beds. Bag one with a view on to the tree-shaded back garden if you can.

① Information

Tourist office (☎05 53 51 82 60; www.tourisme-lascaux.com; place Bertrand de Born; ☀9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat) Around 200m west of place Tourny, next to the 14th-century Église St-Georges le Prieuré.

① Getting There & Away

The only buses – stopping on place Tourny – are inconveniently geared around school times, so your own wheels are really a must. Montignac is 25km northeast of Les Eyzies on the D706.

The Dordogne Valley

DOMME

POP 1037

Commanding an unparalleled view across the surrounding countryside from a dizzying outcrop above the Dordogne, Domme is one of several of France's official *plus beaux villages* in this area. It's also one of the area's best preserved *bastides*, retaining most of its 13th-century ramparts and three original gateways. Approached via a tortuous

switchback road from the valley below, it's the perfect defensive stronghold – a fact not lost on Philippe III of France, who founded the town in 1281 as a bastion against the English. The town's imposing clifftop position is best appreciated from the esplanade du Belvédère and the adjacent promenade de la Barre, which both offer panoramic views across the valley.

📍 Sights

Grottes Naturelles à Concrétions

CAVES

(adult/child incl museum €8/5.50; ☀tours 10.15am, 11am, noon, 2.15pm, 3pm, 4pm, 5pm & 6pm) Honeycombed by the stone underneath the village is a series of large caves decorated with some of the most ornate stalactites and stalagmites in the Dordogne. A lift whisks you back up at the end of the 45-minute tour. Tickets are available from the tourist office, opposite the entrance to the caves.

Musée d'Arts et Traditions Populaires

HISTORY MUSEUM

(adult/child €4/3, with cave ticket, free; ☀10.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Apr-Sep) Across the square from the tourist office, artefacts here include clothing, toys and tools, mainly from the 19th century.

🍽 Sleeping & Eating

La Guérinière

B&B €€

(☎05 53 29 91 97; www.la-gueriniere-dordogne.com; Cénac et St-Julien; d €80-95; 🍷🍷🍷) Surrounded by its own 6-hectare grounds complete with a tennis court, rooms at this wonderful *chambre d'hôte* about 5km south of Domme along the D46 are all named after flowers and finished with impeccably good taste: our faves are Mimosa, with its sloping roof and chinoiserie wardrobe, and the supersize Blue room. Book ahead for *tables d'hôte* (€25 including wine) using mostly organic produce.

L'Esplanade

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 28 31 41; www.esplanade-perigord.com; rue du Pont-Carral; d €85-150; 🍷🍷) This place is an absolute spoil from start to finish. Teetering on the edge of the village ramparts, it's a traditional family-owned hotel with a twist of designer chic: four-poster beds, antique desks and upholstered armchairs fill the elegant rooms, some of which have balconies with mind-boggling valley views. Downstairs there's a top-notch **restaurant** (menus €25-45) with a to-die-for terrace overlooking the esplanade du Belvédère.

i Information

Tourist office (☎05 53 31 71 00; www.ot-domme.com; place de la Halle; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm)

i Getting There & Away

Domme is 18km south of Sarlat along the D46.

LA ROQUE GAGEAC & AROUND

POP 431

La Roque Gageac's jumble of amber buildings crammed into the cliff-face above the Dordogne have earned it recognition as another of France's *plus beaux villages*, with flourishing gardens thanks to its micro-climate. It's an idyllic launch for a canoe trip or cruise, while a trio of the region's most famous castles are within a few minutes' drive.

o Sights

Fort Troglodyte

FORT

(adult/child €5/2; ☀10am-6pm) A warren of meandering lanes lead up to La Roque's dramatic fort, where a series of defensive positions constructed by medieval engineers have been carved out from the overhanging cliffs.

Jardins de Marqueyssac

GARDENS

(www.marqueyssac.com; adult/child €7.20/3.60; ☀10am-7pm) Signposted walkways wind through Marqueyssac's manicured overhanging gardens, 3km west of La Roque, to a breathtaking *belvédère* (lookout).

Château de Castelnaud

CASTLE

(www.castelnaud.com; adult/child €7.80/3.90; ☀10am-7pm) The massive ramparts and metre-thick walls of this quintessential castle 4.5km southwest of La Roque are topped by crenellations and sturdy towers. From up here you can see right across the Dordogne Valley to Castelnaud's arch-rival, the Château de Beynac. The castle's **museum of medieval warfare** displays daggers, spiked halberds and huge trebuchets. If you fancy seeing them in action, **mock battles** are staged from mid-July to August, as well as one-hour guided **evening tours** by costumed actors (adult/child €9.60/5) – check the events diary on the website.

Château de Beynac

CASTLE

(www.beynac-en-perigord.com; Beynac-et-Cazenac; adult/child €7.50/3.20; ☀10am-6.30pm) Looming ominously from atop a limestone bluff 5km northwest of La Roque, this 12th-century château's panoramic position above the Dordogne made it a key defensive posi-

tion during the Hundred Years War. Apart from a brief interlude under Richard the Lionheart, Beynac remained fiercely loyal to the French monarchy, often placing it at odds with the English-controlled stronghold of nearby Castelnaud. Protected by 200m cliffs, a double wall and double moat, it presented a formidable proposition for would-be attackers, though it saw little direct action.

Highlights include the château's **Romanesque keep**, a grand **Salle des États** (State Room) and frescoed **chapel**, and the 16th- and 17th-century **apartments** built to lodge the castle barons. From the battlements, there's a vertigo-inducing view along the Dordogne to the château of Marqueyssac.

Below the castle, a steep trail leads to **Beynac-et-Cazenac** (population 515), another of France's *plus beaux villages*, 150m below on the river bank, where scenes from the Lasse Hallström-directed movie *Chocolat* (2000), starring Johnny Depp and Juliette Binoche, were filmed along rue de l'Ancienne Poste.

Château des Milandes

CASTLE

(www.milandes.com; Castelnaud-la-Chapelle; adult/child €8.50/5.50; ☀10am-7pm) This 15th-century château, 8.5km southwest of La Roque, is less famous for its architecture (impressive though it is) than its former owner: glamorous African-American dancer, singer and music-hall star **Josephine Baker** (1906–75), who took the Parisian cultural scene by storm in the 1920s with her raunchy performances. Her most famous stage outfit consisted of a string of pearls and a skirt of bananas, and she often liked to walk her pet cheetah, Chiquita, on a diamond-studded lead around Paris, terrifying her fellow pedestrians.

Baker purchased the castle in 1936 and lived here until 1958. She was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honour for her work with the French Resistance during WWII. She was later active in the US civil-rights movement and is also remembered for her 'Rainbow Tribe' – 12 children from around the world adopted as 'an experiment in brotherhood' (Brangelina, take note).

The château houses a **museum** documenting the life of the great Ms Baker, and her famous tunes tinkle out from the speaker system as you stroll around. Ask for an English-language leaflet. Between May and

GABARRE CRUISES

A timeless way to explore the region's scenery is aboard a *gabarre*, a flat-bottomed, wooden boat traditionally used to transport freight up and down the rivers of the Périgord and Lot Valley. *Gabarres* were a common sight in this part of France until the early 20th century, when they were eclipsed by the rise of the railway and the all-conquering automobile.

These days *gabarres* have been reinvented as pleasure vessels offering tranquil cruises departing from several points, from around April until October. Trips generally last about 55 minutes and cost €8.50/6 per adult/child; advance reservations are recommended.

Operators in and around La Roque Gageac include **Gabarres Caminade** (☎05 53 29 40 95; gabarrescaminade@wanadoo.fr Le Bourg, La Roque Gageac); **Gabarres de Beynac** (☎05 53 28 51 15; www.gabarre-beynac.com, in French; Le Port, Beynac-et-Cazenac), which does slightly shorter, cheaper trips departing from Beynac (note that kids cruise for free in the mornings); and **Gabarres Norbert** (☎05 53 29 40 44; www.norbert.fr; Le Bourg, La Roque Gageac).

Bergerac and Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne also have *gabarre* cruises.

October there are also 30-minute-long daily displays by the château's **birds of prey**.



Activities

Paddling along the river offers a changing panorama of soaring cliffs, castles and picturesque villages. La Roque's quay also serves as a launch point for short **river cruises** aboard a traditional *gabarre* (above). Canoe-trip operators include the following:

Canoe Dordogne

CANOEING

(☎05 53 29 58 50; www.canoe-dordogne.fr, in French; €5-19) Self-guided trips of between one and five hours from various points upriver of La Roque, as well as guided trips in an eight- to 10-person canoe.

Canoe Vacances

CANOEING

(☎05 53 28 17 07; www.canoevacances.com; La Peyssière; canoeing €5-20, canyoning €4-7) Itineraries include La Roque to Les Milandes (9km), from Carsac to La Roque (16km) and Carsac to Les Milandes (25km); adventurous types can try a spot of canyoning. Its base is about 2km northeast of La Roque.



Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation options are pretty limited, with only a handful of hotels in the area, but the tourist offices in La Roque Gageac and Beynac-et-Cazenac have lists of campgrounds and *chambres d'hôte*.

La Belle Étoile

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 29 51 44; www.belleetoile.fr; Le Bourg; d €55-75, ste €130; ☉Apr-Oct; ☎) Right on La Roque Gageac's riverfront, this family-

run hotel resides in an old stone building with hefty timber beams. Higher-priced rooms come with river views, but those at the cheaper end of the scale look out over the village. Its **restaurant** (menus from €28; ☉lunch Tue & Thu-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) opens to a vine-draped terrace.



Information

Tourist office hours vary seasonally.

Beynac-et-Cazenac tourist office (☎05 53 29 43 08; www.cc-perigord-noir.fr, in French; D703)

La Roque Gageac tourist office (☎05 53 29 17 01; www.cc-perigord-noir.fr, in French; Le Bourg)



Getting There & Away

La Roque Gageac is 15km south of Sarlat, via the D46 and D703; there's no public transport.

Monpazier

POP 539

The best-preserved *bastide* in this corner of France, Monpazier was founded in 1284 by a representative of Edward I (King of England and Duke of Aquitaine). It had a turbulent time during the Wars of Religion and the Peasant Revolts of the 16th century, but despite numerous assaults and campaigns, the town has survived remarkably intact.



Sights

Place des Cornières

TOWN SQUARE

From the town's three gateways, Monpazier's flat, grid-straight streets lead to the arched market square (also known as place

Centrale), surrounded by a motley collection of stone houses that reflect centuries of building and rebuilding. In one corner is an old *lavoir* once used for washing clothes. Thursday is **market** day, as it has been since the Middle Ages.

Château de Biron

CASTLE

(www.pays-de-bergerac.com; adult/child €6.50/4.50; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Feb-Dec) Some 8km south of Monpazier, this much-filmed château is a glorious mishmash of styles, having been fiddled with by eight centuries of successive heirs. The castle was finally sold in the early 1900s to pay for the extravagant lifestyle of a particularly irresponsible son.



Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Edward 1er

HOTEL €€

(☎05 53 22 44 00; www.hoteledward1er.com; 5 rue St-Pierre; d €84-104, ste €132-162; ☎☎) Rooms in this tower-topped château/mansion get more luxuriant the more you pay: top-of-the-line suites have a choice of jacuzzi or Turkish bath, and views of surrounding hills. It feels slightly dated considering the price tag, but the owners are full of beans, and there's an excellent **restaurant** (menus €29-37.50; ☎dinner Thu-Tue Apr-Oct).

Hôtel de France

HOTEL €

(☎05 53 22 60 06; www.hoteldefrancemonpazier.fr; 21 rue Saint Jacques; d €40-70; ☎Apr-Oct) Parts of this epicentral yellow-brick *auberge* date back centuries (the central staircase was built in the 1400s), so it certainly feels historic. There are wooden furnishings, old rugs and flowery wallpaper in the rooms, small shuttered windows overlooking the town's rooftops and a solid country **restaurant** (menus from €16). Opening hours (for the hotel and the restaurant) are unpredictable so call ahead.

Bistrot 2

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(☎05 53 22 60 64; www.bistrot2.fr; Monpazier; menus €24) Opposite the town's medieval gateway, this modern bistro in a square stone-front inn reinvents traditional Périgord staples with minimalist dishes, contemporary flavours and metropolitan style. The wisteria-draped terrace is perfect for Sunday lunch or twilight suppers.



Information

The **tourist office** (☎05 53 22 68 59; www.pays-des-bastides.com; place des Cornières;

☎10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Tue-Sun) is in the southeastern corner of the square.



Getting There & Away

Monpazier is 50km southwest of Sarlat and 50km southeast of Bergerac.

Bergerac

POP 28,638

Rich vineyards and flat fields surround Bergerac, capital of the Périgord Pourpre and one of the largest wine-growing areas of the Aquitaine, which centres on its cobble old town and medieval harbour.

The town's main claim to fame is the dramatist and satirist Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-55), whose romantic exploits – and oversize nose – have inspired everyone from Molière to Steve Martin. Despite the legend (largely invented by the 19th-century playwright Edmond Rostand), Cyrano's connection with the town is tenuous at best – he's thought to have only stayed here a few nights if at all.

Bergerac's international airport and central location between Périgueux (47km to the northeast) and Bordeaux (93km to the west) makes it a handy gateway to the region.



Sights & Activities

The prettiest parts of Bergerac's old town are place de la Mirpe, with its tree-shaded square and timber houses, and place Pelissière, where a jaunty statue of Cyrano de Bergerac looks up at the nearby church.

Gabarres de Bergerac

RIVER CRUISES

(☎05 53 24 58 80; www.gabarres.fr, in French; quai Salvette; adult/child €8/5; ☎Easter-Oct) Bergerac's wine trade flourished with the river transport provided by *gabarres* (p583), the pivotal role of which is recalled aboard 50-minute cruises.

Maison des Vins

WINE TASTING

(www.vins-bergerac.fr; 1 rue des Récollets; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2-7pm) Sample the area's famous drops or pick up information on touring the local wine country; alternatively maps and info are available from the tourist office.

The town's main museums are dedicated to Bergerac's twin vices:

Musée du Vin et de la Batellerie

WINE MUSEUM

(place de la Mirpe; admission €3; ☎10am-noon & 2.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon Sat, 2.30-6.30pm

Sun) Wonderfully musty displays of vintage winemaking equipment and scale models of local river boats.

Musée d'Anthropologie du Tabac

TOBACCO MUSEUM

(10 rue de l'Ancien Port; adult/child €4/free; ☎10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sat, 2.30-6.30pm Sun) Inside the 17th-century Maison Peyrardère, spanning 3000 years including a collection of ornate pipes.



Sleeping & Eating

If you don't mind travelling a bit further afield, sleeping and eating choices include some superb places in the surrounding countryside.



Château les Merles

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎05 53 63 13 42; www.lesmerles.com; Tuilières, Mouleydier; d €165-185, ste €215; @☎☎) Behind its 19th-century neoclassical facade, this interior designer's dream is a study in modish minimalism. Monochrome colour schemes including black-and-white sofas, slate-grey throws and artfully chosen antiques run throughout the rooms, most of which would look more at home in Paris than the deep Dordogne, 13km east of Bergerac. It's got wit, style and sexiness in spades: tripod floor lamps, gilt-framed mirrors and just-so objets d'art, along with a nine-hole **golf course** and an utterly ravishing fusion **restaurant** (menus €36-43).

Château Les Farcies du Pech'

B&B €€

(☎06 30 19 53 20; www.chambre-hote-bergerac.com; Hameau de Pécharmant; d €110; ☎mid-Mar-mid-Nov) Along with its own brace of vintages, this château-winery-B&B 2km north of Bergerac has five rooms all finished in the same scrubbed-up style: patterned rugs, colour-washed walls, hardwood floors and the odd patch of original stonework. The French brekkie, served in the wood-beamed kitchen, is a treat.

Le Colombier de Cyrano et Roxane

B&B €€

(☎05 53 57 96 70; 17 rue du Grand Moulin; www.samedimidi.com, in French; d €68-78; ☎) One of several sweet *chambres d'hôte* in Bergerac's old town around place de la Mirpe (its alternative address), this 16th-century blue-shuttered stone building has just two colourful rooms with hefty wooden beams

and a flower-filled terrace where you can doze off in the hammock.

Hotel du Commerce

HOTEL €

(☎05 53 27 30 50; www.hotel-du-commerce24.fr; 36 place Gambetta; d €58-62; ☎☎☎) In a relaxed spot on place Gambetta, this good-value hotel has functional if rather characterless rooms with contemporary furnishings and up-to-date bathrooms (air-conditioned rooms cost a few extra euros).



La Ferme de Biorne

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(☎05 53 57 67 26; Lunas; www.biorne.com; menus €19-27; ☎Tue-Sun Apr-Oct by reservation) Flapping birds at this *ferme auberge* (farm restaurant) in the Périgordine countryside, 13km northwest of Bergerac, feature in dishes like flame-grilled *magret* (breast) and foie gras-stuffed quail.

L'imparfait

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(☎05 53 57 47 92; 6-10 rue des Fontaines; www.imparfait.com; menus €21-27) Tucked in a 12th-century cloister. Modest prices belie the artful cooking at this local secret.



Information

Tourist office (☎05 53 57 03 11; www.bergerac-tourisme.com; 97 rue Neuve d'Argenson; ☎9.30am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat; @☎) Friendly and knowledgeable.



Getting There & Away

AIR Bergerac's **airport** (www.bergerac.aeroport.fr, in French), 4km southeast of town, is served by several budget carriers. Destinations include Paris Orly, Bristol, Brussels Charleroi, Edinburgh, London Stansted, London Gatwick, East Midlands, Liverpool, Birmingham, Exeter, Leeds-Bradford, Southampton and Rotterdam.

TRAIN Bergerac is on the regional line between Bordeaux (€15, 1½ hours, hourly) and Sarlat (€11.20, 1½ hours, every two hours). For other destinations change at Le Buisson.

THE LOT

Southeast of the Dordogne is the warm, unmistakably southern Lot *département*, which formerly comprised the northern section of the old province of Quercy (along with the northern half of the modern-day *département* of Tarn-et-Garonne). The dry limestone plateau is covered with oak trees, and riddled with canyons carved by the serpentine River Lot. Its *préfecture*, Cahors, is surrounded by celebrated vineyards.

POP 21.128

Slicing through the centre of Cahors, bd Léon Gambetta – named after the French statesman who was born in Cahors in 1838 – neatly divides Vieux Cahors (old Cahors) to the east and the new city to the west.

The city is ringed on three sides by the quays, which once harboured its river-going traffic but are now mostly used by cyclists, rollerbladers and afternoon strollers.

Pont Valentré

BRIDGE

The six-span Pont Valentré, on the western side of the city, south of the train station, is one of France's most iconic medieval bridges. Built as part of the town's defences in the 14th century, the parapets projecting from two of its three tall **towers** were designed to allow defenders to drop missiles on attackers below. On the bank opposite the

0 200 m
0 0.1 miles



bridge, numerous Roman coins have been found at the natural spring known as the Fontaine des Chartreux, dedicated to the city's Gallo-Roman goddess Divona, which still supplies the city's drinking water.

Cathédrale St-Étienne

CATHEDRAL

Similar in style to the Cathédrale St-Front in Périgueux, the airy nave of Cahors' Romanesque cathedral, consecrated in 1119, is topped by two cupolas (at 18m wide, the largest in France). Some of the frescos are 14th century, but the side chapels and carvings in the **cloître** (cloister; ☺Jun-Sep) mainly date from the Flamboyant Gothic period in the 16th century. On the cathedral's north facade is a carved tympanum depicting Christ surrounded by fluttering angels and pious saints.

Tour du Pape Jean XXII

ARCHITECTURE

(3 bd Léon Gambetta) At the top of the old city, the Tour du Pape Jean XXII (closed to the public) is the town's tallest building at 34m high. It was originally part of a 14th-century mansion belonging to Jacques Duèse (later Pope John XXII), who constructed the Pont Valentré and founded Cahors' university.

Old City

ARCHITECTURE

In the Middle Ages, Cahors was a prosperous commercial centre, and the old city is densely packed with timber-fronted houses and galleried mansions built by the city's medieval merchants. Many are marked on

the *Itinéraires à Travers la Ville* leaflet from the tourist office.

Mechanical clock

CLOCK

(place St-Urcisse) Near the cathedral, the 1997-installed clock looks like something out of Tim Burton's sketchbook.

Cahors has just a couple of museums:

Musée Henri Martin

MUSEUM

(Musée Municipal; www.mairie-cahors.fr/musee, in French; 792 rue Émile Zola; adult/child €3/1.50; ☺11am-6pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 2-6pm Sun) Displays include works by the Cahors-born pointillist painter Henri Martin (1893-1972).



Musée de la Résistance

MUSEUM

(place Général de Gaulle; ☺2-6pm)

Little museum exploring the city's experiences during WWII.



Sleeping

Grand Hôtel Terminus

HOTEL €€

(☎05 65 53 32 00; www.balandre.com; 5 av Charles de Freycinet; d €70-100, ste €130-160; ☺☺) Built circa 1920, Cahors' original railway station hotel evokes an air of faded grandeur. Most of the rooms are large and quite comfortable, with hefty radiators, roll-top baths and king-size beds. The decor's starting to look a little dated and the suites are seriously overpriced, but its restaurant, Le Balandre, can't be beat.

Hôtel Jean XXII

HOTEL €

(☎05 65 35 07 66; www.hotel-jeanxxii.com, in French; 2 rue Edmond-Albé; s €48, d €58-65; ☺) Huddled next to the Tour Jean XXII, this excellent little hotel mixes original stone, greenery and well-worn wood with a dash of metropolitan minimalism. Smart rooms have muted colours, and there's a reading area on the 1st floor where you can unwind in leather armchairs.

Auberge de Jeunesse

HOSTEL €

(☎05 65 35 64 71; fjt46@wanadoo.fr; 222 rue Joachim Murat; dm €13.20; ☺9am-12.30pm & 2-7pm; ☺) In an old convent, Cahors' hostel is basic but friendly and functional, with 50 beds in four- to 10-bed dorms and a rambling garden.



Eating

Le Balandre

GASTRONOMIC €€€

(☎05 65 53 32 00; www.balandre.com; 5 av Charles de Freycinet; menus €42-90; ☺lunch Tue-Sat, dinner daily) With chandeliers, sparkling

Cahors

Top Sights

Cathédrale St-Étienne	C4
Tour du Pape Jean XXII	B1

Sights

1 Cloître	C4
2 Mechanical Clock	D5
3 Musée de la Résistance	A1
4 Musée Henri Martin	A3

Sleeping

5 Auberge de Jeunesse	A3
6 Hotel Jean XXII	B1

Eating

7 Le Lamparo	C5
8 Le Marché	C4
9 Les 2 Pâtes	C5
10 L'Ô à la Bouche	D5
11 Marché Couvert	C5
12 Marie Colline	D5

glasses and napkins you could cut your finger on, the Grand Hotel Terminus' gourmet restaurant continues to command a devoted following, especially for its foie gras and *confit de canard*. Ask about its program of **cooking courses** (6hr class €95).

L'O à la Bouche

FRENCH €€

(0205 65 35 65 69; 134 rue St-Urcisse; menus €19.50-26.50; ☺Tue-Sat) '*Cuisine creative*' are the watchwords at this refined little restaurant where classic ingredients are given a fresh spin, such as cod in a peanut crust and a gorgeous '*tout coco*' chocolate pudding.

Le Marché

FUSION €€

(0205 65 35 27 27; www.restaurantlemarche.com; 27 place Jean-Jacques Chapou; lunch menus €19, menus €28-50; ☺Tue-Sat) Puce-and-cream armchairs, razor-edge wood and slate walls set the designer tone at the Market, and the menu's just as swish, ranging from roast tarragon beef to lemon-scented sea bass.

Marie Colline

VEGETARIAN €

(0205 65 35 59 96; 173 rue Georges Clemenceau; mains €8.50; ☺lunch Tue-Fri, closed Aug; ♿) This familial little bistro has such a traditional feel that it comes as something of a surprise that its menu (a handful of daily choices) is entirely meat- and fish-free. Solo diners are seated at a sociable communal table.

Also recommended:

Les 2 Pâtes

ITALIAN, BELGIAN €

(81 bd Leon Gambetta; menus €7.50-10; ☺11am-9pm Mon-Sat; ♿) Pick up a panini, pasta-and-sauce combo or Belgian fries (served with a minifork) to take away or eat on the streetside covered terrace.

Le Lamparo

ITALIAN €€

(0205 65 35 25 93; www.lamparo.com; 76 rue Georges Clémenceau; menus €12-23; ☺Mon-Sat; ♿) Decent wood-fired pizzas, pastas and other staples served in a Med-style dining room.

Self-Catering

Cahors' top place for supplies is the **Marché Couvert** (place des Halles), usually referred to as Les Halles.

The open-air **market** takes place on nearby place Jean-Jacques Chapou on Wednesdays and Saturdays.



Entertainment

Les Docks (0205 65 22 36 38; 430 allées des Soupis; ☺☺) is a former warehouse turned

cultural centre near the Pont Valentré, with regular gigs, theatre, films and a multi-media café.

Check what's on in Cahors with the tourist office.

i Information

Comité Départemental du Tourisme (0205 65 35 07 09; www.tourisme-lot.com; 1st fl, 107 quai Eugène Cavaignac; ☺8am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm) Information on the Lot *département*.

Cyber Informatique (place Clément Marot; per hr €2; ☺10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 2-8pm Sun) Internet access.

Post office (257 rue Président Wilson)

Tourist office (0205 65 53 20 65; www.tourisme-cahors.com, in French; place François Mitterrand; ☺9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat)

i Getting There & Away

BUS The tourist office has a booklet of bus timetables, *Les Bus du Lot* (www.lot.fr, in French), but most routes are geared around school-term times, making buses of limited use. Services between Cahors and Figeac (€11.70, 1½ hours, four to five daily) stop at Tour-de-Faure, the nearest access to St-Cirq Lapopie.

CAR Major car-hire companies are located at the train station. Parking is free along the river and at place Charles de Gaulle.

TRAIN Cahors is on the main line to Paris Gare d'Austerlitz (€68, five hours, eight to 10 daily), Brive-la-Gaillarde (€18, 1¼ hours), Limoges (€30.50, 2¼ hours) and Souillac (€13, 45 minutes). From Souillac there are SNCF buses to Sarlat (€2, 40 minutes, two daily).

East of Cahors

The narrow, corkscrew D662 (signposted 'Vallée du Lot') tracks the banks of the River Lot eastwards from Cahors towards Figeac. It's a wonderfully scenic, if hair-raising, drive, with appealing stops and detours along the way. Figeac can also be reached directly from Cahors by the easier D653.

GROTTE DE PECH MERLE

Discovered in 1922, the 1200m-long **Grotte de Pech Merle** (0205 65 31 27 05; www.pechmerle.com; adult/child €8/4.50; ☺9.30-noon & 1.30-5pm Apr-Oct) is perched high on the hills above the riverside town of Les Cabrerets, 30km northeast of Cahors. One of the few decorated caves to be discovered around the Lot Valley, Pech Merle makes an in-

triguing comparison to those in the Vézère, with several wonderful galleries of mammoths, cows, bison and dappled horses, as well as some unique hand tracings, fingerprints and human figures. But the most memorable part of the cave is saved till last – a beautifully preserved adolescent footprint, clearly imprinted into the muddy clay floor.

Entry is by guided tour (usually in French, but some have an English translation) and includes admission to the museum and a 20-minute film (in French and English). Reserve well ahead by phone if you're visiting in peak season as visitor numbers are limited to 700 per day.

ST-CIRQ LAPOPIE

POP 223

Teetering at the crest of a sheer cliff high above the River Lot, miniscule St-Cirq Lapopie's terracotta-roof houses and ramshackle streets tumble down the steep hillside, affording incredible valley views. It's one of the most magical settings in the Lot but be warned: if it's peace and tranquillity you're looking for, you won't find it in high summer.

Sights

Near the tourist office is the early-16th-century **Gothic church** and the steep path up to the ruined **château** at the summit of the village, where you'll be rewarded with a jaw-dropping panorama across the Lot Valley.

Many of the village's houses have been converted into artists studios producing pottery, craftwork and jewellery.

St-Cirque museums:

Maison de la Fourdonne HISTORY MUSEUM
(☎05 65 31 21 51; adult/child €1.50/1; ☎2.30-7pm) Has a small town museum housing a collection of old postcards, pots and archaeological artefacts.

Musée Rignault ART MUSEUM
(admission €1.50; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm) Eclectic collection of French furniture and African and Chinese art and a delightful garden.


Sleeping & Eating

Auberge de Sombrol HOTEL €€
(☎05 65 31 26 08; www.lesombrol.com; s €50, d €72-80; ☎) A gorgeous option, with seven cosy doubles and a titchy attic room sparingly decorated with artworks, and up-to-date bathrooms peppered around the

red-roofed house. Local ingredients like foie gras, lamb and trout are cooked up at its delightful **restaurant** (lunch menus €15-19.50, other menus from €26.50; ☎lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat).

Le Gourmet Quercynois REGIONAL CUISINE €€
(☎05 65 31 21 20; www.restaurant-legourmet-quercynois.com, in French, menus €20-36) The village's top *table* is a charmingly chaotic place with a menu of biblical proportions ranging from *nougat de porc* to country *cassoulet* (stew). The tables are packed in tight, but you can escape to the little patio to catch the evening rays. The in-house **deli** sells local spoils, including *cèpe* (porcini) mushrooms, gingerbread and chestnut cake.

Good campgrounds near St-Cirq:

 **La Plage** CAMPGROUND €
(☎05 65 30 29 51; www.campingpage.com; sites €15; ☎Apr-mid-Oct; ☎☎) Riverside campground on the left bank of the Lot near a small swimming beach, with a slew of amenities including canoe and kayak rental.

La Truffière CAMPGROUND €
(☎05 65 30 20 22; http://camping-truffiere.com; Le Causse; sites €16; ☎) Along the D42, 2.5km from St-Cirq in leafy grounds.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎05 65 31 29 06; www.saint-cirqlapopie.com, in French; ☎10am-7pm) is in the village hall.

Getting There & Away

St-Cirq is 25km east of Cahors and 44km south-west of Figeac.

BUS Buses between Cahors (45 minutes) and Figeac (€11.70, one hour, four to five daily) stop at Tour-de-Faure; from here, it's a lung-busting 3km uphill walk to the village.

CAR The main car park (€3) is at the top of the village. There's also a free one further down, from which a path leads up to St-Cirq's main street.

FIGEAC

POP 10,736

The riverside town of Figeac, 70km north-east of Cahors, has a rough-and-ready charm that comes as a refreshing change after many of the prettified towns in these parts. Traffic buzzes along the river boulevards and the old town has an appealingly lived-in feel, with shady streets lined with ramshackle medieval and Renaissance

houses, many with open-air galleries on the top floor (once used for drying leather). Founded by Benedictine monks, the town was later an important medieval trading post and pilgrim's stopover.

Sights

Medieval & Renaissance architecture

ARCHITECTURE

The historic centre of Figeac is place Vival, where the tourist office occupies the ground floor of an arcaded 13th-century building, part of Figeac's lost abbey. Pick up the leaflet *Les Clefs de la Ville* (€0.30) for a guide to the town's medieval and Renaissance architecture. **Rue de Balène** and **rue Caviale** have the best examples of 14th- and 15th-century houses, many with wooden galleries, timber frames and original stone carvings, while **rue de Colomb** has several fine *hôtels particulier* dating from the Renaissance.

Musée du Vieux Figeac

HISTORY MUSEUM

(adult/child €2/1; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun Sep-Jun) Upstairs from the tourist office, the town's historical museum has a collection of antique clocks, coins, fossils and minerals and a propeller blade made by a local aerospace firm.

Musée Champollion

WRITING MUSEUM

(place Champollion; adult/child €4/2; ☎10.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun) Named after the Figeac-born Egyptologist and linguist Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832), whose efforts in deciphering the Rosetta Stone provided the key for cracking Egyptian hieroglyphics, the lavishly restored mansion where he was born is now devoted to the history of writing, with exhibits ranging from illustrated medieval manuscripts to Chinese writing tools. Behind the museum on place des Écritures is a huge **replica of the Rosetta tablets**, created by artist Joseph Kosuth in 1990.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostellerie de l'Europe

HOTEL €€

(☎05 65 34 10 16; www.hotel-europe-figeac.com; 51 allée Victor Hugo; s €54-61, d €62-72; ☎☎☎☎) Behind the crimson-shuttered facade, up-to-date rooms at this efficient hotel come with spacious bathrooms, although most are short on character. Its trump card is the gourmet **restaurant** (menus €14.50-34; ☎lunch Sun-Thu, dinner Sat-Thu) La Table de Marinette – Figeac's finest for old-fashioned Quercynois dishes. It's

just across the river from the old town on one of the main exit roads.

Hôtel-Café Champollion

HOTEL €

(☎05 65 34 04 37; hotelchampollion@orange.fr; 3 place Champollion; d €45-53; ☎☎) Decked out with modern art, the cool café-bar downstairs from this epicentral hotel is as popular for a late-night *bière à la pression* (draught beer) as a morning café. While that means noise can be taxing, surprisingly sleek contemporary rooms are kitted out with mod cons including flat-screen TVs. A couple more caveats: there's no lift and no nearby parking.

Hôtel des Bains

HOTEL €

(☎05 65 34 10 89; www.hoteldesbains.fr; 1 rue Griffoul; d €45-70; ☎☎☎☎) Sailing along by the riverside like a salmon-pink pleasure vessel, this family-owned hotel makes a cheap, cheery stopover in Figeac. Formerly a public bathhouse (hence the name), the hotel's 19 mostly air-conditioned rooms are small and low-key, decked out in crisp whites and sunny pastels; the choicest ones have balconies overlooking the river.

Brasserie 5

BRASSERIE €€

(☎05 65 50 10 81; 5 place Champollion; menus €15-26; ☎Tue-Sun) Dark wood, plate-glass windows and rich colour schemes give this glossy restaurant a cosmopolitan feel, but while the food offers inventive variations on classic dishes, service operates at a snail's pace.

Self-Catering

Figeac's lively Saturday-morning **market** takes place under the 19th-century cast-iron arcade on place Carnot, with stalls also filling place Champollion and place Vival.

Information

Post office (8 av Fernand Pezet) Currency exchange.

Tourist office (☎05 65 34 06 25; www.tourisme-figeac.com; place Vival; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun Sep-Jun)

Getting There & Away

BUS SNCF buses run west to Cahors (€11.70, 1½ hours, four to five daily) via Tour-de-Faure, and south to Villefranche de Rouergue (€6.60, one hour, six to eight daily) and Najac (€8.90, 1¼ hours, six to eight daily).

TRAIN Trains run north to Brive-la-Gaillarde (€13.60, 1¼ hours, six daily).

VILLEFRANCHE DE ROUERGUE

POP 12,673

Villefranche's origins as a *bastide* are barely recognisable beneath the main roads, refurbished buildings and busy shopping streets. But, despite first impressions, it warrants a brief stop. At the centre of the timber-framed old town is the arcaded **place Notre Dame** – a typical example of a *bastide* square – which still hosts the lively Thursday-morning market. Nearby is the square-pillared 15th-century **Collégiale Notre Dame**, with its never-completed bell tower and choir stalls, ornamented with a menagerie of comical and cheeky figures.

FREE Musée Urbain Cabrol (☎05 65 45 44 37; place de la Fontaine; ☉10am-noon & 2-6.30pm Tue-Sat Jul & Aug, 2-6pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep), a few blocks to the southwest, has an eclectic collection of religious art, local folk art and 19th-century medical equipment. The **fountain** out the front, decorated with 14th-century carvings, gushes from a natural spring.

The **tourist office** (☎05 65 45 13 18; www.villefranche.com, in French; promenade du Guiraudet; ☉9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is next to the town hall.

Villefranche's hotels are patchy; your best bet is **Le Relais de Farrou** (☎05 65 45 18 11; www.relaisdefarrou.com; rte de Figeac; s €70-95, d €75-106; 🍷🍷), a ruthlessly modernised *relais de poste* in secluded gardens 4km from town. Upmarket facilities include tennis courts, minigolf and even a helipad (just in case you brought your chopper), as well as a glass-paned gastronomic **restaurant** (menus €22-48).

There are regular buses to Figeac (€6.60, 40 minutes, every two hours) and Najac (€4.60, 15 minutes, every two hours).

NAJAC

POP 774

If you were searching for a film set for Camelot, you've found it. On a hilltop above a hairpin bend in the River Aveyron, the town's castle, the **Forteresse Royale de Najac** (adult/child €4.50/2.80; ☉10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm), looks as if it's fallen from the pages of a fairy tale: slender towers and fluttering flags rise from the crenellated ramparts, surrounded on every side by dizzying *falaises* (cliffs) dropping to the valley floor below. A masterpiece of medieval military planning, and practically unassailable thanks to its position, Najac was a key stronghold during the Middle Ages,

and was hotly contested by everyone from English warlords to the powerful counts of Toulouse. Its architecture is beautifully preserved, and the view from the central keep is unsurprisingly superb.

The castle is reached via a steep 1.2km-long cobbled street from **place du Faubourg**, a beguiling central square surrounded by a hotchpotch of timber-framed houses, some from the 13th century. Beyond the castle is the austere Gothic **Église St-Jean**, constructed and financed by local villagers on the orders of the Inquisition as punishment for their heretical tendencies.

To take in the glorious surrounding countryside on horseback, contact **Centre Équestre de Najac** (☎05 65 29 72 90; per hr/day €12.50/59; ☉Apr-Sep).

Sleeping & Eating

TOP CHOICE Oustal del Barry

HOTEL €€

(☎05 65 29 74 32; www.oustaldelbarry.com; place du Faubourg; s €49, d €59-77; ☉late Mar-Oct; 🍷🍷) The best place to stay in town is this wonderfully worn and rustic *auberge*, with haphazard rooms filled with trinkets and solid furniture to match its venerable timber-framed facade. Definitely get a room with a balcony if you can. Even if you're not staying here, be sure to stop by its country **restaurant** (lunch menus €19, menus €25-43.50; 🍷🍷), renowned for miles around for its traditional southwest cuisine, which you can master yourself during a five-day **cooking course** (incl 4 nights half board €400).

La Salamandre

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(☎05 65 29 74 09; rue du Barriou; menus €18-36) Simple but charming, this little restaurant is a treat for its local dishes and wonderful panoramic terrace overlooking the castle.

Information

Najac's tiny **tourist office** (☎05 65 29 72 05; www.tourisme-najac.com, in French; 25 place du Faubourg; ☉9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is on the southern side of the main square.

Getting There & Away

Trains link Najac with Figeac (€8.50, 50 minutes, two to four daily).

West of Cahors

Downstream from Cahors, the lower River Lot twists its way through the rich vineyards of the Cahors Appellation d'Origine

Contrôlée region, passing the dams at **Luzech**, the medieval section of which sits at the base of a donjon, and **Castelfranc**, with a dramatic suspension bridge. Sights in this region are few and far between – this is working land first and foremost, and the landscape becomes increasingly industrial the further west you travel from Puy l'Évêque. Along the river's right bank, the D9 affords superb views of the vines and the river's many twists and turns.

About 15km west of Puy l'Évêque on the GR36 trail, the imposing feudal **Château de Bonaguil** (www.bonaguil.org, in French; Fumel; adult/child €7/4; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm) is a fine example of late-15th-century military architecture, artfully integrating cliffs, outcrops, towers, bastions, loopholes, machicolations and crenellations.

North of Cahors

Some of the Lot's most striking sights lie north of Cahors near Limousin and the Dordogne, including the celebrated pilgrimage site of Rocamadour. Public transport in this area is pretty much nonexistent, so you'll need your own wheels to get around.

ROCAMADOUR

POP 653

The dramatic silhouette of Rocamadour's steeples and pale stone houses clamped to a vertical cliffside beneath the ramparts of a 14th-century château resembles something out of *The Da Vinci Code*. Rocamadour's miraculous Vierge Noire (Black Madonna) drew a steady stream of pilgrims and worshippers from across Europe in the Middle Ages, and tourist traffic is still going strong several centuries on.

Up top, start by exploring the ramparts of Rocamadour's **château** (admission €2; ☎8am-9pm). From here, either follow the switchback staircase down to the old town (which the pious once climbed on their knees) or take the **ascenseur incliné** (cable car; one way/return €2.50/4; ☎9am-7pm) half-way down the cliff to the **Sanctuaires**, a series of 12th- to 14th-century chapels containing the city's most prized relics, including the spooky Vierge Noire in the **Chapelle Notre Dame**.

More steps, and an **ascenseur** (elevator; one way/return €2.50/3; ☎9am-9pm) lead from the Sanctuaires further down to the **Cité** (old city), where you'll find the **Cité tour-**

ist office (☎10.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm). Its commercial thoroughfare, the **Grande Rue**, is crammed (just as in the pilgrims' day) with souvenir shops and touristy restaurants. One of the city's original medieval gateways can be seen at the street's far end.

The **main tourist office** (☎05 65 33 22 00; www.rocamadour.com; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-6pm Sun) is on the plateau above the cliff 1.5km from the Cité, in the largely modern and touristy suburb of **L'Hospitalet**. This area is of limited interest, although kids might enjoy the stalactites and stalagmites of the **Grotte des Merveilles** (www.grotte-des-merveilles.com, in French; adult/child €6/4; ☎10am-noon & 2-6pm).

You'd be better off giving the overpriced hotels and restaurants around Rocamadour a wide berth – prices for even the dingiest room skyrocket in summer, and most hotels are booked out well in advance by tour bus groups.

Rocamadour is 59km north of Cahors and 51km east of Sarlat; there's parking in L'Hospitalet and by the château.

GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC

TOP CHOICE **Gouffre de Padirac** (☎05 65 33 64 56; www.gouffre-de-padirac.com; adult/child €9.20/6; ☎10am-7pm) has glittering caverns that are among the most breathtaking in France. Discovered in 1889, the cave's navigable river, 103m below ground level, is reached through a 75m-deep, 33m-wide chasm. Boat pilots ferry visitors along 1km of the subterranean waterway, visiting a series of glorious floodlit caverns en route, including the soaring **Salle de Grand Dôme** and the **Lac des Grands Gours**, a 27m-wide subterranean lake. From Rocamadour, the caverns are 15km to the northeast.

CHÂTEAU DE CASTELNAU-BRETENOUX

Not to be confused with the Château de Castelnaud (p582), **Castelnau-Bretenoux** (<http://castelnau-bretenoux.monuments-nationaux.fr>; adult/child €6.50/free; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm, last entry 1hr before closing) was originally constructed in the 12th century and saw heavy action during the Hundred Years War, before being redeveloped in the Middle Ages following the advent of new forms of artillery. The castle is laid out around a roughly triangular courtyard, with stout towers linked by ramparts and bulwarks. Most of the rooms open to visi-

tors date from the 17th and 18th centuries, when the castle was mainly used as a residential home rather than a defensive fortress. Having fallen into disrepair in the 19th century, the castle was refurbished by Parisian opera singer Jean Mouliérat, before being donated to the state in 1932. It's about 5km south of Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne along the D940.

CARENNAC

POP 401

A cluster of amber houses and brick cottages make up tiny Carennac, secluded on the left bank of the Dordogne. The village's main landmark is the 16th-century **Château du Doyen**, which now houses a heritage centre/museum, **L'Espace Patrimoine** (www.pays-vallee-dordogne.com, in French; admission free; ☉10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Fri), showcasing the art and history of the region. Above is the square **Tour de Télémaque**, named after the hero of Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, written here in 1699.

Just inside the castle gateway is the **priority** and the Romanesque **Église St-Pierre** (☉10am-7pm) with another remarkable Romanesque tympanum of Christ in majesty, similar to those in Cahors and Beaulieu. Off the **cloître** (adult/child €2.50/0.80), still beautiful despite being heavily damaged in the Revolution, is a remarkable, late-15th-century **Mise au Tombeau** (Statue of the Entombment).

You'll find the **tourist office** (☎05 65 10 97 01; www.tourisme-carennac.com, in French; ☉10am-noon & 2-6pm) next door to the church.

Based in Vayrac, 8km northwest of Carennac, canoe and kayak operator **Safaraïd** (☎05 65 37 44 87; www.canoe-kayak-dordogne.com; Vayrac; per day €15-28) offers lots of possible routes as well as multiday trips.

With flower-filled hanging baskets and stripy awnings, **Hostellerie Fénelon** (☎05 65 10 96 46; www.hotel-fenelon.com; s €49-58,

d €54-70; ☎) evokes the feel of an Alsatian summer house. The rooms are fairly unremarkable (think pink-tiled bathrooms, flowery bedspreads and sunflower-coloured walls), but the pricier ones overlook the river and tree-covered Île Calypso. Half board at the downstairs **restaurant** (menus €24-43) is particularly good value.

MARTEL

POP 1591

Known as *la ville aux sept tours* (the town of seven towers) for its turret-topped skyline, this pale-stone, red-roofed village was the ancient capital of the Vicomte de Turenne, and retains some of the best-preserved medieval architecture in this corner of France.

Buried deep within the pedestrianised centre, the **tourist office** (☎05 65 37 43 44; www.martel.fr, in French; place des consuls; ☉9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat) has maps pointing out architectural and historical highlights and can provide details of the area including working mills that can be visited. It also supplies schedules for the **Chemin de Fer Touristique du Haut-Quercy** (www.trainduhautquercy.info, in French; ☉Apr-Sep), which runs one-hour trips from Martel on diesel trains (adult/child €7/4) and steam trains (adult/child €9.50/5.50) east along the precipitous cliff-face to St-Denis.

The pick of places to stay is **Relais Sainte-Anne** (☎05 65 37 40 56; www.relais-sainte-anne.com; s €50, d €90-145, ste €175-265; ☎☎), with 16 individually decorated rooms that blend country comforts with contemporary flair. Its **restaurant** (menus €23) utilises produce from Martel's **markets**, which are held in the village centre on Wednesdays and Saturdays. **Truffle markets** also take place in the village during December and January.

Martel is 15km northwest of Carennac and 15km northeast of Souillac.

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